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OLI

JOYCE

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J O Y C E

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'THE SECOND SON,' 'A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN,'
'THE WIZARD'S SON,' 'EFFIE OGILVIE,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

It was a coming of age, and yet not a coming of age. The hero in honour of whom all these festivities were, was a bearded man, who had been absent in all sorts of dangerous places since the moment when he was supposed formally to have ended the state of pupilage. That had been later than common, since the will of his uncle, whom he had succeeded, had stipulated that he was to come of age at twenty-five. He was nearer thirty when he came home, bearded as has been said, bronzed, with decorations upon his breast, and a character quite unlike that of the young hero to whom such honours are usually paid. His position altogether was a peculiar one. The estates of the family were not entailed, and Mr. Bellendean of Bellendean, the uncle, had passed over his own brother, who was still living, and left everything to his nephew; so that Norman was in the peculiar position of being received by his father and mother in a house which was not theirs but his, and of standing in the place of the head of the family, while the natural head of his own branch of the family was put aside. The character of the people made this as little embarrassing as it was possible for such a false position to be, but still it was not easy; and as the young man was full of delicate feeling and susceptibility, notwithstanding an acquaintance with the world unusual in his circumstances, he had looked forward to it with some apprehension. Perhaps it would be wiser to say that he thought he was acquainted with the world. He had been 'knocking about' for the last ten years, seeing all the service that was to be seen, and making acquaintance with various quarters of the globe. He thought he knew men and life. In reality he knew a little of Scotland, a great deal of India, and had a trifling acquaintance with some of the colonies; but of London, Paris, all the capitals

that count for anything, and all the life that counts for anything, he was as ignorant as a child.

This combination is one which was not at all unusual in Scotland a generation since, and produced a kind of character full of attraction, the most piquant mixture of experience and ignorance, of simplicity and knowledge, that can be conceived. A man who had an eye as keen as lightning for the wiles of an Eastern, were he prince or slave, but could be taken in with the most delightful ease by the first cab-driver in the streets; who could hold his own before a durbār of astute oriental politicians, but was at the mercy of the first flower-girl who offered him a rosebud for his button-hole, or *gamin* who held his horse. He had the defects as well as the virtues common to a dominant race, and probably was imperious and exacting in the sphere which he knew best; but this tendency was completely neutralised by the confusion which arose in his mind from the fact of finding himself suddenly among a population entirely made up of this dominant race, to whom he could be nothing but polite, whatever their condition might be. He was very polite and friendly to the railway porters, to all the people he encountered on the journey home, and reluctant to give trouble to the pretty fair chambermaids at the hotels, or to pass, without inquiring into their story, the women who begged or sold trifles on the streets. 'A respectable-looking woman, and English by her accent,' he would say. 'We must stop and inquire into it. There must be a reason, you know.' 'Oh yes; probably there's a reason. Come along, or you'll have all the vagrants at your heels,' his more experienced companion would reply. They had thus a little difficulty in getting him safely through the streets at his first arrival. Home was strange to him; it was a place where all the men were honest and all the women true. He was ready to believe everything that was said to him in the new England which somehow was so unlike the old which he had seen only in passing so long ago.

The party he had brought with him consisted of two or three brother officers, unnecessary to dwell upon here; an older friend, Colonel Hayward, whom he had known very well and served under, and who had now retired from the service, who joined young Belvedere in Edinburgh, being already in the North; and a young man about town called Essex, who had made a tour in India a year before, and was very willing to repay the kindness shown him then by taking care of his military friend and steering him through the dangers of London. Essex, who had a mild handle to his name, and was Sir Harry, would have liked to prolong the

period of his tutorship, and lead his young soldier about into pleasures and wonders unknown. But the claims of Bellendean and the great festivities concerted there were supreme. It was thus a party of four or five young men, chaperoned, if the word is applicable, by the *vieux moustache*, the steady old soldier, as ready for a frolic as any of them, who was yet, as he assured them, old enough to be their father, who arrived at the Bellendean station, where flags were flying, and the militia band blaring forth its welcome, and a body of mounted farmers waiting to escort their landlord to his paternal halls. For Bellendean it was a very fine reception indeed; and Norman himself, being of a simple mind, was much impressed. If the others laughed a little, that was partly, no doubt, because they were by no means the heroes of the day, and because, in the eagerness about 'the Ca'ptain,' the desire to identify him, and the disdainful indifference shown to everything that was not he, these gentlemen were thrown into the background, where they grinned and looked on. Colonel Hayward, however, was as much impressed and still more delighted than Norman. He would have liked to shake hands with all the tenantry as he did with Mr. Bellendean the father, and assure them all that 'there could not be a finer fellow;' and when they raised a cheer as the carriage drove off, joined in it lustily, with a sense of being at once a spectator yet an actor in the scene which it was delightful to see.

Bellendean was a handsome house, of no particular age or pretensions, not very far from Edinburgh. That beautiful town was indeed visible from various points in the park, which, on the other hand, commanded a view of the Firth and the low hills of Fife, at the point where the great estuary closes in, and with a peaceful little island in mid-stream, and a ruin or two on the margin of the water, forms that tranquil basin, in which, driven by storms of wind and storms of nations, the Athelings, pious folk, the Confessor's kindred—not strong enough by themselves to hold head against fierce Normans and Saxons any more than against the wild tides of the Northern Ocean—once found a refuge. The rich and mellow landscape, brightened with vast rolling fields of corn and ripening orchards, startled the visitors from India, whose ideas of Scotland were all Highland; but increased their respect for their lucky comrade, of whom they had been accustomed to think that his estate was some little patrimony among the mountains, where there might indeed be grouse and perhaps deer to make poverty sweet, but nothing more profitable. The Lowland landscape lay under a flood of afternoon light. The roads were

populous with passengers,—there were groups of ladies in front of the house, on the terrace to which the long windows opened: a beautiful park and fine trees, and all the evidences of that large life which a country potentate leads in what our fathers called his ‘seat.’ Everything was wealthy, almost splendid; Bellendean himself felt a certain awe as he looked upon all this which was his own. He remembered everything keenly, and yet it had not seemed to him so great, so imposing in his recollection as it was in reality. He had remembered his own favourite haunts, which were not the most important features in the scene. He turned to his father with a curious shyness and embarrassment. ‘I had forgotten ‘what a fine place it was,’ he said; but his eyes said something else, which natural reserve and the presence of strangers kept from his lips. What his eyes said was—‘Pardon! that it should not be yours but mine.’

‘It is a fine place,’ said Mr. Bellendean. ‘The places we have known only in youth are apt to look diminished when we come back. I am glad it has not that effect on you. All the same, my dear boy, I am glad it is you and not I that have to live in it. Neither my wife nor I care much for Bellendean.’

At this Norman grasped his father’s hand, and said, ‘You are very good, sir,’ in a way which much perplexed the excellent Colonel, who did not understand wherein the virtue lay, and who was further stricken dumb by the next question. ‘In the confusion and excitement of seeing you again, I believe I have not asked for Mrs. Bellendean?’

The reader is too experienced not to perceive that this question, which bewildered Colonel Hayward, conveyed the not very extraordinary fact that Norman had a step-mother, which was one of the chief reasons of his long absence. Not that Mrs. Bellendean was a harsh or cruel step-mother, or one of those spoilers of domestic peace who flourish in literature under that title; but only that the young man remembered his mother, and could ill bear to see another in her place. She stood on the steps of the great door at this moment, awaiting the carriage—a woman not more than forty, tall and fair, dressed a little more soberly than her age required, but full of youth and animation in look and figure. A number of ladies stood behind her, some of them ‘as pretty creatures as ever I saw,’ the Colonel said to himself—cousins of all degrees, old playfellows, old friends. The *vieux moustache* stood by while these pleasant spectators surged about young Bellendean. He stood aside and made his remarks. ‘I shouldn’t wonder now if he might marry any one of them,’ he said to himself.

‘ Lucky fellow. I shouldn’t wonder now if they were all waiting till he throws the handkerchief. Talk about sultans ! all those pretty English—no, they are Scotch—girls : and he could have any one of them ! ’ The Colonel sighed at the thought. He belonged himself to an age in which statistics had no place, before it was known that there was a million or so of superfluous women, and being a chivalrous soul he did not like it. He was much pleased to discover afterwards that several of the young ladies were married, and so out of the competition. But it was a pretty sight.

After this the days were tolerably well filled. There was a dinner to the neighbouring gentry, and a dinner to the tenantry. There was a ball. There was a great supper in tents to the labourers and cottagers on the estate ; finally, there was a vast entertainment for the school children in the united parishes of Bellendean and Prince’s Ferry. The Colonel went through them all manfully. He carried out his original impulse, shook hands with everybody, and said, ‘ I assure you he’s a capital fellow. ’ ‘ I had him under my command at So-and-so, and So-and-so, and I know what’s in him. ’ In this way Colonel Hayward was himself a great success. The old county neighbours liked the assurance he gave them, and the farmers delighted in it. And when it came to the turn of the masses, and the old soldier went about among the tables at the labourers’ supper repeating his formula, the enthusiasm was immense. ‘ Eh, Cornel, but that’s a real satisfaction, ’ the old men said. ‘ Sae lang as he’s done his duty, what can mortal man do mair ? ’ His own assurances and reassurances went to the good Colonel’s head. He felt like a trumpeter whose note was the word of command to everybody, and marched about with his head high. ‘ I assure you he’s a capital fellow, a capital fellow— ’ He was in the very act of repeating them, when the words seemed to fail him all at once. He stopped in the middle with his mouth open, and gazed at some one who at that moment for the first time caught his eye.

Was it because her place did not seem to be there ? A girl of twenty or so—tall, slight, her figure like a lily-stalk slightly swaying forward, her head raised, with a tremor of sympathy in every feature. Her face was like a lily too, pale, with large eyes, either brown or blue, he could not be sure which, and long eyelashes uplifted ; and the most sensitive mouth, which smiled yet quivered, and made as though repeating the words, which the eyes seemed to divine before they were said. She was seated at the end of a table with two old people, too old to be her father and

mother, looking as if she had strayed there by some strange chance, as if she had nothing to do with the vulgar features of the feast, like a young princess who had sat down among them to please them. The words were stopped upon the Colonel's lips. He broke down in the middle, and stood staring at her, not knowing where he was. Good Lord ! that face : and sitting there among the common people, among the labourers, the ploughmen ! It did not seem to Colonel Hayward that anybody about was surprised at his stare. They, too, turned round and looked at her kindly, or—not kindly, as the case might be. But they were not surprised. They understood his wonder. - 'Ay, sir, she's a very bonnie lass,' said one old man. 'A bonnie lass ! a bonnie lass !' the Colonel repeated ; but not with the tone in which he had spoken about the capital fellow. It was as if some blow had been struck at him which took away his utterance. He hurried up to Mrs. Bellendean, who stood at the head of the tent looking on. 'A young lady, my dear Colonel ? there are no young ladies there.' 'You must know her if I could but point her out to you. She is like no one else about her. It is not curiosity. I have a particular reason for asking.' 'Tell me what she was like,' the gracious lady said ; but just then her husband came to consult her about something, and the opportunity was lost.

Colonel Hayward retired from his trumpeting for that night. He let Norman's reputation take its chance. He was very silent all the rest of the evening, not even repeating his question when he had an opportunity, but sitting by himself and thinking it over. It was a remarkable face : but no doubt the resemblance must be a chance resemblance. There are so many faces in the world, and some of them here and there must resemble each other. It must be something in his own mind, some recollection that had come to him unawares, an association from the Scotch voices he heard round him. That, when he came to think of it, must have been working in his mind all day ; indeed, ever since he came. And this was the issue. Every mental process (people say) can be explained if you trace it out. And this one was not so difficult after all, not difficult at all, when you came to think of it, he said to himself, nodding his head ; but all the same, he could not help wishing that Elizabeth had been here. And then he began to think again of that girl. She was not like a girl to be found sitting with the ploughmen's families. He seemed to see her before him, especially when he shut his eyes and gave himself up to it, which he did in a retired corner on the terrace after everybody had gone away. Though it was late, there was still light in the skies, partly the lingering

northern daylight, partly the moon, and he shut his eyes while he smoked his cigar and pondered. He could see her before him, that girl, in a dark dress made (he thought—but then he did not know much about it) like a lady's—certainly with a face like a lady's, or how could she have resembled——? Of course, it was only association, and the recollections that came back to him with those Lowland voices. The Highland ones had never affected him in the same way. The fact was, he said to himself, he was never half a man when Elizabeth was not with him. She would have understood the sequence of ideas at once. She would have found out in five minutes who the girl was and all about her, and set him at rest. He was interrupted in those thoughts by the sudden irruption of the band of young men with their cigars into the balmy quiet of the night. It was warm, and they had found the smoking-room hot. 'And there is old Hayward gone to sleep in a corner,' he heard one of them say.

'He must not sleep,' said Mr. Bellendean; 'wake him up, Norman. The air here is too keen for that.'

'I am no more asleep than any one of you young fellows,' the Colonel said, jumping up. 'But as old Hayward has more sense than a set of boys, he kept outside here in the cool while you were all heating yourselves in the smoking-room. I don't think they've got the best of it this time, Mr. Bellendean, eh?'

'They don't half so often as they think,' said the other old gentleman. They were neither of them very old, but they drew together with a natural sympathy amid that band of youth.

Next day was the concluding day of the Bellendean festivities, and it was chiefly to be devoted to the children. In the afternoon the park was turned into an immense playground. Every kind of game and entertainment that could be thought of was provided. There was a conjurer, there was Punch, there was a man with marionettes, and what the children liked still better, there were games of all kinds, in which they could themselves perform, which is always more agreeable than seeing other people do so. And finally, there was tea—a wonderful tea, in which mountains of cake and cookies innumerable disappeared like magic. The ladies were all there, serving actively the flushed and happy crowds of children, throwing themselves into it with much more sympathy than they had shown with the substantial feasts of the previous days. The young men were set free, they were not required to help in the entertainment of the boys and girls; and except Norman, who had bravely determined to do his duty to the end, the male portion of the company was represented only by Mr.

Bellendean and the Colonel, who looked on from the terrace, and finally took a walk round the tent where the meal was going on, and partook, as the newspapers say, of a cup of tea at a little separate table in a corner, where Mrs. Bellendean was taking that refreshment. It was when the Colonel (who liked his tea) was standing with a cup in his hand, just outside the great tent, which was steaming with the entertainment, that he suddenly stopped once more in the midst of a little speech he was making about the pleasure of seeing children enjoy themselves. He stopped with a little start, and then he set down his cup and turned back to watch something. It was afternoon, but the sun was still high in the skies, and even under the tent there was full daylight, impaired by no shadows or uncertainty. The shade within gave a suppressed and yellow glow to everything, something like the air of a theatre: and in the midst there she stood once more, the girl of last night! The Colonel gazed at her with an absorption, an abstraction, which was extraordinary. He saw nothing but only her alone. She had been seated by the old ploughman on the previous night as if she belonged to him; but now she was moving about among the children as the young ladies were doing, serving and encouraging: her dress was very simple, but so was theirs, and there was not one of them more graceful, more at her ease. Everybody knew her. She seemed to be referred to on all hands; by the children, who came clinging about her—by the visitors, who seemed to consult her upon everything. Who could she be? The clergyman's daughter perhaps; but then, how had she come to be seated last night between the old couple, who were clearly labouring people, at the cottagers' supper? And how had she come by that face? Whoever she might be, gentlewoman or rustic maiden, how had she come by that face? There was the wonder.

The Colonel stood fascinated, immovable, at the tent-door, looking in, seeing all the moving crowd of faces only as a background to this one, which seemed, in his fancy, to reign over them all. Her face was not still and attentive, as on the previous night, but full of animation and life. He watched the children come round her as they finished their meal, which was pretty to see; he watched the ladies coming and going, always circling more or less about this one figure. He watched Norman going up to her, holding out his hand, which she took, showing for the first time a little rustic shyness, curtsying as if he had been a prince. Then he saw a quite different sort of man from Norman, one of the schoolmasters, go to her in his turn and say something

in her ear, with an evident claim upon her attention and a lingering touch on her arm, which spoke much, which made the Colonel angry, as if the fellow had presumed. But the girl evidently did not think he presumed. A smile lighted up her face, which she turned to him looking up in his. Colonel Hayward felt a movement of impatience take possession of him: and then a still stronger feeling swept across his mind. As she turned her face with that look of tender attention to the man who addressed her, she turned it also to the spectator looking at her from the tent-door. The line of the uplifted head, the soft chin, the white throat, the eyes raised with their long eyelashes—‘Good God! who is she?’ he said aloud.

Mrs. Bellendean saw the absorbed expression in his face, and came and stood beside him to see what he was looking at. Her own face relaxed into smiles when she found out the object of his gaze. ‘Oh, I don’t wonder now at your interest, Colonel. I am sure she has had no tea; she would never think of looking after herself. Now, come, you shall see her nearer; she is worth looking at: Joyce!’ she cried.

‘Joyce! Good God!’

CHAPTER II

COLONEL HAYWARD sank down upon a bench which stood close to the tent door. The light swam in his eyes. He saw only as through a mist the light figure advancing, standing docile and obedient by the side of the great lady. The name completed the extraordinary impression which the looks had made; he kept saying it over to himself under his breath in his bewilderment. 'Joyce! Good Lord!' But presently the urgency of the circumstances brought him to himself. He breathed in his soul a secret desire for Elizabeth: then manned himself to act on his own behalf, since no better could be.

'This is the very best girl in the world, Colonel Hayward,' said Mrs. Bellendean, with a hand upon Joyce's shoulder. 'I don't wonder she interested you. She has taught herself every sort of thing—Latin and mathematics, and I don't know all what. Our school is always at the head in all the examinations, and she really raises quite an enthusiasm among the children. I don't know what we should do without her. Whenever we come here, Joyce is my right hand, and has been since she was quite a child.'

If it was condescension, it was of the most gracious kind. Mrs. Bellendean kept patting Joyce on the shoulder as she spoke, with a caressing touch: and her eyes and her voice were both soft. The girl responded with a look full of tenderness and pleasure. 'Oh, mem, it is you who are always so good to me,' she said.

The schoolmistress then! That was how the ploughman's daughter had got her superior look. When he saw her closer, he thought he saw (enlightened by this knowledge) that it was only a superior look, not the aspect of a lady as he had supposed. Her dress had not the dainty perfection of the young ladies' dresses; her hands were not delicate like theirs: and she said 'mem' to

her patroness with an accent which—— Ah! but what did that accent remind him of? and the face? and, good heavens! the name? These criticisms passed like a cloud across his mind; the bewilderment and anxiety remained. He rose up from the bench, nobody having thought anything of his sudden subsidence, except that perhaps the old Colonel was tired with standing about. Oh that Elizabeth had been here! but in her absence he ~~must~~ do what he could for himself.

‘Young lady,’ he said, ‘would you tell me ~~how~~ you got your name? It is a very uncommon name: and your face is not a common face,’ he added, with nervous haste. ‘I knew some one once——’

His voice seemed to go away from him into his throat. It was curious to see him, at his age, so unsteady and agitated, swaying from one foot to another, stammering, flushing under the limpid modest eyes of this country girl, who, on her part, coloured suddenly, looked at him, and then at Mrs. Bellendean, with a faint cry, ‘Oh, sir!’

‘Where she got her name?’ said Mrs. Bellendean. ‘It is not so easily answered as perhaps you think. I will tell you afterwards. It is a very uncommon name. Joyce, my dear, what is the little secret you have been plotting, and when is it to be made known?’

The young woman stood for a moment without replying. ‘How can I help wondering?’ she said, with a long-drawn breath. ‘How can I think of common things? Nobody has ever asked me that question before.’ Then, with a sudden effort, she recovered her self-control. ‘It will be nothing,’ she said quickly, as if to herself; ‘it will be some fancy: I’ll go back to my work. It was no secret worth calling a secret, Mrs. Bellendean—only some poems they learned to please me—to say to you and the other ladies, if you will take your seats.’

‘Where would you like us to take our seats, Joyce?’

‘Yonder, under the big ash-tree. It’s very bonnie there. You can see the Firth, and the ships sailing, and St. Margaret’s Hope; and you will look like the Queen herself, with her ladies, under the green canopy. Will I put the chair for you?’ cried the girl, in a Scotch confusion of verbs. She gave the Colonel one glance, and then hurried off, as if determined to distract her own attention. There were a few garden-chairs already scattered about under a clump of trees, which crowned a little platform of green—a very slight eminence, just enough to serve as a dais. She drew them into place with a rapid and cunning hand, and caught quickly at

a Turkish rug of brilliant colour, which lay beside the tea-table, placing it in front of the presiding chair. Her movements were very swift and certain, and full of the grace of activity and capacity. Meantime the Colonel stood by the side of Mrs. Bellendean, surveying all.

'She is excited,' said the lady. 'She is a strange girl: your question—which I have no doubt is a very simple question—has set her imagination going. See what a picture she has made! and she could sketch it too, if there was time. She is a sort of universal genius. And now she is all on fire, hoping to find out something.'

'Hoping to find out—what?'

'Oh, my dear Colonel, it is a long story. I will tell you afterwards—not a word more now, please. I don't want her to form expectations, poor girl—— Well Joyce—is that where I am to sit? I shall feel quite like the Queen——'

'With the young ladies behind,' said Joyce, breathless. Her eyes were full of impatient light, her sensitive lips quivering even while they smiled—a rapid coming and going of expression, of movement and colour, in her usually pale face. The Colonel stood gazing at her, his mouth slightly open, his eyes fixed. Oh, if Elizabeth were but here, who would know what to do!

The scene that followed was very pretty, if his mind had been sufficiently free to take it in. The little girls, in their bright summer frocks, subdued by the darker costumes of the boys, poured forth from their eclipse under the tent, and gathered in perpetually moving groups round the little slope. The ladies took their places, smiling and benignant—Mrs. Bellendean in the centre, two of the prettiest girls behind her chair, the others seated about. They all submitted to Joyce, asking, 'Shall I sit here?' 'Shall I stand?' 'What am I to do?' with gay docility. When it was all arranged to her liking, Joyce turned towards the children. She stood at one side, pointing towards the pretty group under the trees, holding her own fine head high, with a habit of public speaking, which the Colonel thought—and perhaps also Norinan Bellendean, who was looking on—one of the prettiest sights he ever saw.

'Children,' said the young schoolmistress, lifting her arm, with simple natural eloquence, 'this is a tableau—a beautiful tableau for you to see. If you ever read the word in a book, or in the papers, you will know what it means. It is a French word. It means a living group—that is like a picture. This is our Scots Queen Margaret—a far grander Queen than her they call the

Queen of Scots in your history-books—Margaret that was the Atheling, that married Malcolm Canmore, that was the son of King Duncan, who was murdered by—who was murdered by—— Speak quick! what do you mean, you big girls? Why, it's in Shakespeare!' cried Joyce, with a ring of indignant wonder in her voice, as if the possibility of a mistake in such a case was beyond belief.

There was a movement among a group of girls, and some whispering and hasty consultation: then one put forth a nervous hand, and cried, but faltering, 'Macbeth.'

'I thought you would not put me to shame before all the ladies!' cried Joyce, with a suffusion of sudden colour; for she had been pale with suspense. Then she added, in a business-like tone: 'It is you, Jean, that are to say Portia. The Queen will hear you. Come well forward, and speak out.'

It was not a masterpiece of elocution. The speaker blushed and fumbled, and clasped and unclasped her fingers in agonies of shyness—while Joyce stood by with her head on one side, prompting, encouraging, her lips forming the words, but only twenty times more quickly, as her pupil spoke them. The Colonel was so absorbed in this sight that he started when a voice spoke suddenly at his elbow, and recoiling a step or two instinctively, saw that it was the young man, evidently a schoolmaster, who had been with Joyce in the tent. He was looking at her with a mixture of tenderness and pride.

'It is quite wonderful how she does it,' he said. 'I've no reason to think I'm unsuccessful myself with my big boys; but I have not got them under command like that. They will make very acute remarks, sir, that would surprise you, in the Shakespeare class—but answer like that, no. It is personal influence that does it—and I never saw anybody in that respect to equal Joyce.'

It gave the Colonel a sensation of anger to hear this fellow call her Joyce. He turned and looked at him again. But there was nothing to object to in him. He was not a gentleman; but he was what is called in his own class quite a gentleman—a young fellow of very tolerable appearance, whose clothes were of the most respectable description, and who wore them as if he were used to them. He had as good a necktie as Norman's, and a flower in his coat. But when he stood by Norman it was apparent that there was a good deal wanting.* He was in all probability much cleverer than Norman. He spoke of Shakespeare with an awe-striking familiarity as if he knew all about him—which was

more than the Colonel did. All the same he felt a sensation of offence at the use by this man of the girl's Christian name.

'Miss Joyce—is evidently a young lady of unusual gifts,' he said.

The face of the young man flushed with pleasure. 'Sir,' he cried, 'you never said a truer word. She is just running over with capability. She can do anything she sets her hand to. I sometimes feel as if I grudged her to be in the line of public tuition all her life. But when there are two of us,' he added proudly, 'we will see what we can do.'

What did the fellow mean? two of them! and one this wonderful girl? the Colonel turned his back upon him in indignation, then turned again in curiosity. 'Is it common,' he said, 'in Scotch parish schools to have a Shakespeare class?'

'Our common people, sir,' said the young man quietly, with a look of self-complacence which made the Colonel long to knock him down—'our common people are far more educated as a rule than you find them in England. But no—I would not say it was common. There are many of my friends that have poetry classes, which are optional, you know, on a Saturday afternoon or other free moment. I'm not ashamed to say that it was from her I took the hint—though you will think it is seldom a woman takes the lead in such a matter. She started it, and several of us have followed her example. She is, as you say, a creature of most uncommon gifts.'

'And yet a ploughman's daughter in a Scotch village: with that face—and that name!'

The young schoolmaster gave a sort of doubtful cough, the meaning of which the Colonel could not divine. 'That is how she has been brought up,' he said; 'but you are perhaps not aware, sir, that many a wonderful character has come from a Scotch ploughman's house. Not to speak of Burns, there was—'

'Oh, I am aware the Scotch are a most superior nation,' cried the Colonel, with a laugh.

'That is just the simple truth,' the young man said.

Meanwhile the recitations were going on, which perhaps were not equal in quality to the rest of Joyce's arrangements. She was in extreme earnest about it all, it was evident to see, and eager that everything should produce the best effect. A few mothers, who had known what was going to happen, had gathered about, listening with proud delight yet anxiety lest they should break down, each to her own child. Among them was a little old woman, sunburnt and rosy as a winter apple, with an old-fashioned black bonnet tied down over her ears, and a huge Paisley shawl almost

covering her dark cotton gown. 'You think but of your own bairns,' she was saying, 'but I think of them a'; for it's a' my J'yce's doing, and she will just break her heart if there's any failure.'

'There will be nae failure; they're owre weel trained for that.'

'I've na a word to say against J'yce; but she's awfu' fond of making a show,' another woman said.

'If she's fond of making a show, it's never of hersel',—it's always your bairns she puts to the front; and if you dinna like it,' cried the old woman, 'what brings ye here?'

The Colonel, who had the best of manners, stepped forward and took off his hat. 'I guess by what you say, ma'am, that you are Miss Joyce's mother?' he said.

The old woman was a little startled and fluttered by this unexpected address. She, too, hesitated, as they all seemed to do. 'Weel,' she said, 'sir, I'm all the poor thing has had for one; but no so good as she deserved.'

'Ma'am,' said the Colonel, 'the result of your training speaks for itself, and that is the best practical test. Will you let me ask you a question—and that is, whether the name Joyce is a family name?'

The old woman's mouth and her eyes opened in astonishment. 'Joyce,' she said feebly, 'a family name?'

'I mean—does she take it from a relation, as I have always heard was the admirable Scotch way?'

'Weel, sir,' said the old lady, 'if that is all, I have little doubt ye are quite right. She would get it, it's mair than probable, from her mither.'

The Colonel gazed upon her with surprise. More than probable! what did she mean? 'Then it is your name too,' he said, with a little disappointment. There arose from the group a sudden burst of laughter and explanation and denials, of which he could not make out a word. 'Na, na,'—that was all that reached him clearly. But what was meant by it—whether that it was not the old mother's name, or what other negative—he could not make out: and just at this moment Mr. Bellendean and Norman came up to him and drew him away.

'You have had enough of this, I am sure, Colonel. Come along, we are going down to the Ferry to see what Essex and the rest are after. It's very good of you to give us your countenance to the last.'

'My countenance! nothing of the sort, Norman. I'm very much interested.'

'In the little girls and their "pieces?"' said Mr. Bellendean.

'In the young lady there who has taken so much trouble.'

'What young lady?' said the elder gentleman, looking about. Then he added, in a careless tone, 'Oh, Joyce! Yes, she's an interesting creature, isn't she! It will please my wife if you admire Joyce.'

'I think then, sir,' said Norman, 'I'll please Mrs. Bellendean too.'

'Oh, you! you're a different matter. You had better keep to your own set, my boy,' said the father. 'If you are so absorbed, Colonel, we'll leave you till you have had enough. You'll find us at the Ferry. Come, Norman, and look after your friends.'

The two gentlemen went away, the Colonel stayed. He was becoming accustomed to the name and the face which had so much disturbed him. If indeed it was a family name—and likenesses, we know, are very fantastic—still for the sake of the name and face, he would like, he thought, to see something more of her; he would like to give her some token of his interest, if she would let him. He did not think that he had ever been so much interested in any one before. He thought he could never forget this little scene. Perhaps, on the whole, he was tired of the recitations. He took a little stroll about, but came back always to a point where he could see her. If Elizabeth were but here! She would have known in a moment what to do. She would have found out all about it; how the girl got that name at least, if not how she got that face. By and by the little performance came to an end, and Mrs. Bellendean made a gracious little speech praising every one, and got up from the place under the trees where she had been posing as Queen Margaret; and the children began to get into movement, to arrange themselves in their respective bands, and to prepare for going away.

'How good of you to stay all the time, Colonel Hayward! They did their best, poor things; but even Joyce cannot create a soul in the Jeanies and Jennys. Now I think we had better go in; it is almost time to dress,' Mrs. Bellendean said.

The Colonel could not but follow, but he cast wistful looks behind him. 'I suppose it would only annoy her: but I should like to see more of her,' he said.

'Of Joyce? Colonel Hayward, I am afraid you are a dangerous person. I can't have you turning the head of the best girl in the world.'

He looked round again, lingering, unable to quit the spot. The little procession was marshalled and ready to set out. But on the

spot where she had stood prompting and directing her pupils the young schoolmistress was still standing, lingering like himself. She was looking after him with wistful eyes, with a look of wondering disappointment, as if she had expected something more. That look awakened all the old excitement, which had partially calmed down in the Colonel's heart. The attitude, the raised head, the wistful look in the eyes, all moved him again as at the first, with an overpowering sense of likeness, almost identity. 'What does it mean?' he said; 'I feel as if I could not tear myself away. Who is she? There must be something in a resemblance like that.'

'Whom does she resemble, Colonel Hayward?'

The Colonel turned round again and gave his questioner a look. He looked at her as if he wanted to know how far he could trust her. And then his eyebrows and his mouth worked. 'Of some one—a lady—who has been long dead,' he replied, 'and her name—her name!'

'You are very serious, Colonel; it is not only a passing interest? It is really something—something! Oh, forgive me. I cannot have her disturbed. She is all quivering with imagination and wonder.'

'Mrs. Bellendean, there is some mystery about this girl. Why should she wonder, why should she be disturbed? Me, yes. I am much disturbed. It is something—of which I have not spoken for years. Oh, if Elizabeth were only here!'

'Then come with me to my room,' Mrs. Bellendean said; 'if we stay here we shall be interrupted every moment. I am beginning to get excited myself. Come this way. The window is always open, and nobody will know we are there.'

She turned for a moment and waved her hand to Joyce, who had just taken her place at the head of the band; then, turning up a side path, led Colonel Hayward round an angle of the house to the open window of a little morning-room. 'Here,' she said,— 'we can talk in quiet here.'

CHAPTER III

It was a little business-room, but the business in it was chiefly feminine. There were baskets of work, shelves full of books in homely covers, a parish or Sunday-school library, and all the paraphernalia of a country lady who 'takes an interest' in her poorer neighbours. It was the room in which Mrs. Bellendean interviewed those of her dependants or retainers who came to ask her advice, or whom she sent for to be reproved or counselled. Her own chair stood in front of a formidable-looking writing-table, and one other stood close by, awaiting the respondent or defendant, whoever he or she might be. The windows looked into a closely surrounding shrubbery, which shut out the view—as if landscapes and such vanities had nothing to do with the sternness of the business transacted here. Over the mantelpiece hung a large engraving of Dr. Chalmers—the presiding divinity. Colonel Hayward came in after her, somewhat tremulous, with a sense that some revelation was about to be made to him. The excitement which he had tried to put off, which he had tried to represent to himself as without foundation, as proceeding from merely accidental resemblances, had once more gained command of him, and with more power than ever. He felt certain now that some discovery deeply concerning him was about to be made.

'Joyce,' Mrs. Bellendean began, 'is——'

'I beg your pardon. Joyce what? Tell me her other name.'

'My dear Colonel Hayward, if you will only listen to me! Joyce—has no other name. Oh yes, she takes the name of the good old people who have brought her up, who love her like their own child. She is a foundling, Colonel Hayward.'

'A foundling!' The word did not discompose him as she had expected, but evidently took him by surprise. A look of profound perplexity came upon his face. He shook his head slightly, and gazed at her, as if he did not know what to think.

'The story has been told to me so often that I feel as if I had known all about it throughout, though this happened long before I came here. It is a little more than twenty years ago. A lady arrived one evening at the inn in the village. It is a very poor little place—the sort of place where people coming out from Edinburgh on Sundays——'

He made her a little silent yet impatient sign of assent.

'You understand? Yes, a little bit of a place, where they had a humble room or two sometimes to let in summer. She arrived there quite unexpectedly. She had been going by Queensferry to Fife and the North, and was too tired to go on. And they had no room for her at the Ferry hotel. She had no maid or any one with her, but she seemed a lady to the people here. They were all quite sure she was a lady—very like what Joyce is now, pale, with that little movement of her lips which I tell Joyce—— Colonel Hayward, you look as if you knew, as if you had known—— Oh, do you think you can throw any light——'

'For God's sake go on—go on!'

'To spare you the details,' said Mrs. Bellendean, 'the poor thing was about to have a baby: but showed her condition very little—so little that there was no alarm, nor any idea of a—of a catastrophe. She walked about a little in the evening, and perhaps over-tired herself. Anyhow, in the middle of the night she was taken ill. The people made a great fuss when they knew what it was, and wanted her to tell them who her friends were, and her husband, and all that, which probably made everything worse, though they had no unkind meaning. And so when the child was born——'

The Colonel got up from his seat. He went to the window and looked out, turning his back upon her; then returned to his chair like a man distracted. Mrs. Bellendean paused in her narrative, startled by the sudden movement, and sat silent watching him. He said, in a sort of hoarse whisper, 'She died?'

'Not immediately. What happened was almost worse than dying; she went out of her mind. Women have many things to bear that nobody thinks of. They are subject to attacks of that kind at such times. The doctor thought she would get better of it; but she did not live to get better, poor thing! My sister-in-law, who was here then, heard of her, and was very much interested and did all she could. But the poor girl died in about three weeks, without ever being able to tell them where she came from or who she was. They made out that her name was Joyce, from her own wanderings and from the letters.'

Colonel Hayward said with his lips, 'The letters?' scarcely making any sound.

'There was one letter, without any envelope or address, which appeared to be from her husband. And on the night she arrived, before she was taken ill, she had begun to write, to him apparently, about something that had come between them, something that had driven her nearly mad. Colonel Hayward! Yes, they were read by the people who took charge of the poor little baby and who managed everything. I understand what you mean; it was like prying into the secrets of the poor dead lady. But what could they do? What do you say? Name? No, there is no name. The husband's letter is signed only H—— Ah! you know! I am sure you know!'

The Ah! which came from Mrs. Bellendean's lips was very nearly a scream. The Colonel had risen to his feet, with a pallor upon his face and a gasp for breath which frightened her. He stood as if any touch would have knocked him down, as if scarcely conscious what he was about. His faculties seemed to fail him for the moment. He put up his hand with a sort of dumb appeal, as if to stop what she was saying. Then he himself with an effort broke the silence. She leaned forward with the greatest excitement and expectation. But all that was audible were the words that had been going through his mind all day, 'Oh, if Elizabeth were only here!'

'Elizabeth—who is Elizabeth?' Mrs. Bellendean cried.

He did not make any reply, nor did he seem to hear, but began to walk up and down, passing and repassing between her and the window. He seemed to be arguing, talking to himself, comparing what he had heard with something else. 'But I never suspected that—never. She said nothing. There might be another—another. It might be all the while, it might be all the while—some one else. How can I tell? Only a name, a name! and so long ago. Oh, if I only had Elizabeth here! Elizabeth would know.'

Mrs. Bellendean here rose up too and touched him on the arm. She was trembling with the excitement of this encounter, which suddenly made the story of the poor young mother—a sort of tradition in the village—into something real. 'Colonel,' she said, 'you know something; you can tell us something? For God's sake, if there is any clue, don't let it go. Tell me, for that poor girl's sake.'

Her touch seemed to restore him to himself. He looked round vaguely, and seeing that she was standing, drew forward her chair with old-fashioned politeness. 'A boorish fellow,' he cried, 'a

boorish fellow you must think me, not to perceive that you were standing. How can I beg your pardon? The fact is, that without Elizabeth—without Elizabeth—there is no good to be got out of me.'

Mrs. Bellendean was a woman full of energy and promptitude. 'If that be so, then let us send for her at once,' she said.

The Colonel made a hasty movement of satisfaction. 'But I am scarcely known to you myself,' he cried. 'How could I take such a liberty? Only your son's old colonel; and he is not even your son.'

'He is a great deal more—he is the master of this house. Who should be so welcome as his own friends? And if I count for anything, and any light can be thrown on this mystery—oh, Colonel!'

'I don't know,' he said; 'I don't know. My mind is all in a whirl. There are some things that make me think—and then there are other things. It is more than I can make head or tail of—alone. And then it's a serious thing—oh, a very serious thing. If I were to do anything hasty, and then it were to turn out a mistake ——'

He said this with such an air of trouble, and at the same time of confidence, that his listener met his look with one of involuntary sympathy, and murmured an assent.

'She will say I am hasty. I am always hasty; but then, in the circumstances—— And it is not a case for half measures. If this should be!' A shiver of strong feeling seemed to pass over him. 'It would make a revolution in our lives,' he went on; 'it would change everything. There must be no half measures. If ever there was a case in which she had a right to be consulted—— And then she'll understand in a moment—she'll see through it. If it's credible: it sounds incredible; but on the other hand——' He gave her once more that appealing look, as if the dilemma in which he found himself must be evident to her, then added hastily, 'Will you really be so very good, notwithstanding the little you know of us? But I might go and get rooms at the Ferry, and not trouble you.'

'You shall do nothing of the kind,' she said peremptorily, with a decision that was balm to him. 'Let us not lose a moment, Colonel Hayward. Here is a telegraph paper; will you write it yourself, or shall I?'

He took it from her, and lifted a pen from the table, but his hand shook. 'I am very nervous,' he said. 'It is absurd, but I can't help it. If you will write, "Come at once; I am in great need of you." That will do.'

'Come at once. I am in great need of you,' repeated Mrs. Bellendean; 'had not you better add that you will meet her by the early train? Will she be likely to travel by night?'

'She will come by the first train, whenever that may be.'

'That will be the night express. I shall add, "Will meet you at Edinburgh." And now you must put the address.'

He paused a little without replying. 'You would think that alarming, perhaps, if you got it all at once without any warning?'

'Yes,' she said, with a smile, 'I fear I should; but then no one thinks my help so important as you evidently feel your—this lady's to be.'

'My wife,' he said gravely; 'my wife. Yes, she is very important. Perhaps you will put at the last, "Nothing that is alarming—rather good." I think that will do. To Mrs. Hayward, Rosebank, Fairhill, Surrey. How can I ever thank you enough!' He stooped over her hand, which held out the paper, and kissed it with old-fashioned gratitude—'To let me send for her, when I am but a stranger myself.'

'I hope she will be able to help you, Colonel Hayward; and I hope my poor Joyce will get the benefit.'

'Ah!' he cried. He had come to himself by means of the ready intervention of the practical in the person of Mrs. Bellendean, but faltered again at this as if she had struck him a blow.

'Perhaps,' she added hastily, 'you would like to see—the letters, and the other relics? perhaps——'

He rose up from his seat. 'I must go and send this,' he said, and hurried from the room. He came back again, however, a moment after, looking in through the half-opened door. 'When Elizabeth comes,' he said, and disappeared again.

Mrs. Bellendean had been greatly excited by the idea of thus touching upon a real romance of life—a story such as comes to light rarely in the commonplace world. The old Colonel's emotion, the excitement with which he had listened to the narrative, the evident stirring up of old recollections in his mind, and attempt to piece it out from his own knowledge of something which had passed long ago—had wound her up to a pitch of suspense and eagerness almost as great as his own. But a certain comic element came in with the sudden summons of Elizabeth, and the evident determination to put the whole matter, whatever it might be, on his wife's shoulders, and to put off the inquiry until she should appear. Poor Elizabeth!—probably a comfortable mother, suddenly shaken out of domestic peace, and sent for in hot haste to unravel a mystery with which most likely she had nothing to

do. Mrs. Bellendean laughed softly to herself: but then changed her expression, and sighed. She was herself of no such importance to any one. She reflected that, if any difficulty should happen in the life of her own husband, she would be the person from whom, above all others, it would be concealed. No one in the world would think of summoning *her* to aid him in a desperate crisis. She would be spared all unpleasant knowledge: what everybody would say would be—Don't say anything to her; why should we disturb her? Perhaps the Elizabeth of Colonel Hayward's thoughts would have been glad to be so exempted from the troubles of life. But Mrs. Bellendean was not glad. She envied the other woman, upon whom it appeared that, habitually, all that was troublesome was thrown. What kind of a woman must she be—an old campaigner, a strong-minded person—who kept the good old Colonel in subjection? That was the most probable explanation.

Mrs. Bellendean sat a little thinking this over, and then she went back to her duties, to see after her guests. The school treat had been happily the end of all the public performances; but with so many people in the house, every dinner was a dinner-party. When she went out again upon the terrace, the children were just disappearing in a many-coloured line through the avenue of limes, watched by the ladies who had been made to form Queen Margaret's Court under the great ash-tree. The younger ladies of the party gathered about her as she reappeared. There was one of them who was her special favourite—the only daughter of one of her dearest friends, a distant relation—a little Margaret, to whom she had given her name, and in whom, accordingly, every element of preference centred. Mrs. Bellendean had said to herself that if Greta (which was her pet name, to distinguish her from Maggies and Margarets without number) and Norman should by any chance take to each other—why then! But it must be understood that no match-making was thought of, no scheme, no trap laid—only if they should happen to take to each other! Greta was one of the eager band who came forward to meet the lady of the house. She was a slim girl of nineteen, with silky brown hair and grey eyes—the slightest willowy figure, the most deprecating expression,—a fragile creature, who begged pardon for everything—though in looks, not in words—and yielded at a touch to the bolder spirits about. It was perhaps for this cause that Greta was always made the spokeswoman when anything was wanted in her family and connections; no one had the heart to refuse the pleading of her eyes.

'Aunt Margaret, they want so much to have tableaux to-night, after dinner, before the gentlemen come in, just for ourselves.'

'Oh, I don't see that,' said a voice out of the group behind her. 'We may as well have an audience.'

'And we want them to help. We must have an Edgar Atheling, and a Malcolm Canmore, and all the Court gentlemen.'

'Oh no; dresses for the gentlemen are *impossible*,' said another, more peremptory. 'We can manage for ourselves, but how could we get things for them? Oh no, no!'

Greta stood looking round upon her somewhat rebellious following. 'I wish,' she said, with a slight vexation in her tone, 'you would make up your mind what you do want, before you send me to ask. Aunt Margaret, may we get them up? and will you be Queen Margaret, as you were to-day! And will you let us ask Joyce?'

'Oh, we must have Joyce!' cried the chorus. 'Joyce is indispensable. None of us know much about Queen Margaret. Please let us have Joyce.'

'The tableaux as much as you like,' said Mrs. Bellendean. 'I have no objection; but Joyce—Joyce is quite another matter.'

'How is Joyce another matter?' cried the little surging crowd. 'Joyce is the very first necessity of all. Oh, Aunt Margaret! Oh, Mrs. Bellendean! Oh, Queen, Queen! Why, she is the one that knows. She is the one——'

'My dear girls, you don't think. How do you suppose she can like it, to come and take her part with you, and be complimented by everybody, and then to go away to Peter Matheson's cottage and boil the potatoes for supper? Besides, there are other circumstances——'

'What other circumstances? Oh, tell us! Oh, I hope she is going to break it off with that Mr. Halliday. He is not half good enough for her. But why should that keep her from helping us?'

'Don't ask me fifty questions all in a moment. Hush! don't say anything. Perhaps she may be going to find out about her mother.'

This was very indiscreet of Mrs. Bellendean: but she was so full of her new information that she could not restrain herself. And then there arose from all those soft throats a unanimous 'Oh!' which ran like a little breeze about the house, and disturbed the flowers in the big baskets. 'Who is she? Is she a lady? I am sure she is a lady!' the girls cried.

'I can't tell you any more. And you must none of you say a

word, for she knows nothing; neither do I. I only know that I think—some one knows about her—some one who is here.'

Who could it be? the girls consulted each other with their eyes, and immediately ran over every name of all the dwellers in the house and all the guests, excepting only the old Colonel, of whom nobody thought.

'If there is to be the least hint given, or so much as a look, or anything to awaken her attention—remember in that case she must not come. She must not come: I cannot have her excited and disturbed.'

There was a universal cry of indignant protestation. Tell her! oh no! No one would do such a thing. What did Mrs. Bellendean think of them? Were they such silly things, with so little feeling as *that*? Oh no, no! On the other hand, to be taken out of herself, to be made to forget it, would be such a good thing for Joyce. And how exciting and delightful for everybody! To think she might be a duke's daughter perhaps, or a foreign princess, or, in any case, something altogether out of the common way!

'Well, if it must be so,' said Mrs. Bellendean. 'Greta, I think I can trust you to take care of her. Not a word; not a hint. For after all, it is the very vaguest possibility, and it may come to nothing at all.'

'In that case, don't you think it was a pity to say anything about it?' said the matter-of-fact, common-sense voice of Mr. Bellendean.

He was a man said to be full of common-sense. His wife considered him a wet blanket, always putting out her fires, and quenching all enthusiasm. He had a horrible way of being right which was doubly exasperating. And she had of course regretted that premature hint of hers the moment she had made it. When she turned round and found out that she had taken her husband and his son unwittingly into her confidence, she felt, to use her own words, 'as if she could have cried.'

'Perhaps it was a pity,' she said; 'but one can't always be prudent, and none of you will say a word.'

The young ladies redoubled their protestations, and hurried away to make up to Joyce before she reached the village with her charge. As for Mrs. Bellendean, to avoid further criticism, she turned quickly round upon Norman, who had said nothing, but whose eyes had followed the girls with pleased observation. It was natural, for they were a pretty group.

'Are you very well acquainted with Colonel Hayward?' she asked.

'Acquainted? with old Hayward? Oh yes, I think so,' he said, with a little surprise.

'Then who is Elizabeth?'

The young man had been looking at her with some curiosity. His face suddenly changed now from grave to gay. His eyes lighted up with humour. 'Elizabeth!' he said, with a laugh, 'have you found her out? She is Mrs. Hayward, I know; but I have never seen her. She is his other self—no, that's not the right way of putting it. She is himself, and he is the other. Oh, everybody knows about Elizabeth.'

'She is coming here to-morrow,' said Mrs. Bellendean.

'Coming here! none of us have ever seen her,' he replied. 'She was always at the hills, or home for her health, or something; though some people said she kept close in the bungalow like a native lady, and never would show——'

'Good heavens! she is not a native, Norman, I hope? Don't say that, please.'

'One of your usual hasty proceedings, my dear; but it would be some fun to have a Begum in the house.'

'I don't think it is likely; but I don't know. He was always wishing for her. We made rather a joke of it, I fear. I have heard him, when he was giving his orders—and he is a very smart soldier, dear old fellow, though perhaps you think him a—— I have heard him say between his teeth, "If Elizabeth were but here," when most men were only too thankful their wives were out of the way.'

'I like that,' said Mrs. Bellendean, with a sigh. 'I like it very much. Women would be a great deal happier if their husbands would always treat them so.'

'What! take them out to face the enemy?' her husband said. But he knew very well what she meant; and though he was a very well-bred man, and showed no sign of it, he resented both her little speech and her smaller sigh.

CHAPTER IV

It was not very far from the terrace at Bellendean to Peter Matheson's cottage in the village, which was a cottage with a but and a ben—that is, an outer and an inner, two rooms downstairs, into one of which the door opened, and two others above. There was nothing in front but the village street, from which you could tap at the window of the kitchen in which the family lived; but behind there was a little garden, with some large lilac and rose bushes, and an ash-tree with a small plot of grass round its patriarchal feet. Joyce had come back tired from the dusty walk with the children just as her granny, as she called the old woman who had been her guardian all her life, had taken off the large Paisley shawl and the close black satin bonnet, which were her state costume out of doors. Mrs. Matheson—called Janet in the village, a freedom which Joyce resented—had folded up carefully her 'grand shawl' and laid her bonnet upon it, to be put away presently, and had seated herself in the high-backed wooden chair to rest. The kettle was beginning to boil on a fire kept as low as possible in compliment to the hot June day. Though she had shared in the refreshment under the tent, Janet was not contented to accept that in place of the much-prized cordial of her own brewing. 'Na, na; what ye get out o' an urn may be gran' drinking,' she said, 'but it's never like my tea.' She was waiting till the kettle should boil to 'mask the tea,' which even Joyce did not do altogether to her liking. When the door opened and the girl came in, Janet was sitting, musing as she waited, near the fire, according to cottage custom. She was old, and it was not too warm for her, and she was tired and enjoying what it requires the long habit of toil to enjoy thoroughly, the entire quiescence of physical rest. To sit there, doing nothing, was sweet at her age. In former times she could remember being impatient for the boiling of the kettle. In these days she would have whipped

up her bonnet and shawl and ran upstairs with them, thinking it an idle thing to leave them there even for a moment; and she would have set out the cups while she waited. But now she was not impatient. There was no hurry, and rest was sweet. She looked up when her child came in—who was her child certainly, though not her daughter—with a pride and admiration of her looks, and her dress, and everything about her, that never failed. Joyce wore a dark dress, which she had made herself, after the model of a dress of Greta's. Her little collars and cuffs were like those the young ladies wore, without the slightest ornament. It vexed Janet a little that she would not wear a locket, as all the girls did in the village, and as the young ladies also did. 'It was as if they took her siller from her, or hoarded it up, or grudged her any bonnie thing she would wear. 'Eh! if it was me,' Janet said, 'she would be just as fine as the best. There's naething I would not ware upon her—a gold chain on her neck, and a gold watch at her side, and a ring upon her finger; but she will not be guided by me. And to see her looking like a young queen, and no a thing to show for it but just her ain bonnie looks; eh! I hope it'll not be remembered against us if we're awfu' proud; for Peter is just as bad as me.' But all this was said in the absence of Joyce, and to her face the old mother gave utterance to little phrases of detraction, as it is the part of a mother to do.

'You're very soon back; you're back maist as soon as me. I am just waiting for the water to come a-boil, and then I'll mask the tea. You will be better, after a' yon botheration, and the trouble you've been giving yoursel', of a good cup of tea.'

'I had some in the tent, granny,' said Joyce, sitting down wearily near the door.

'Oh ay! in the tent. If yon's what pleases the leddies it doesna please me. What's the matter with ye? You've just weariet yoursel' with thae weans and their pieces, till ye canna tell whether you're on your head or your heels. Na, na; sit still and rest. I've had naething to tire me. I'll get out the cups mysel', and we'll keep the teapot warm at the side of the fire for Peter. He likes it a' the better the mair it tastes o' the pot.'

'What did you think of it all, granny? Who did you like best? Did you like the tableau, with the Queen and the ladies? Wasn't it like a picture? I wonder if the real Queen Margaret was as handsome as ours, and all her maidens as sweet.'

'Your head is just turned with them, J'yce; and yon would be your doing, too? Putting up Mrs. Bellendean upon a throne, as if she was the duchess. I thought that bid to be one o' your

fancies ; and they just do what ye tell them, it seems to me, young and auld, and the leddy hersel'. Your head would be just turned, if it weren't for me, that never spoilt ye. Sit to the table like a reasonable creature, and take your tea.'

'I don't want any tea, granny. I am only tired. There was a gentleman there——'

'And what's that to you, if there were a hundred gentlemen?' said her guardian quickly. 'Na, na ; there's to be nae talk about gentlemen between you and me.'

'It was an old gentleman, granny,' said Joyce, with a smile curving slightly the grave lines of her mouth.

'The auld anes are often waur than the young anes,' the old woman said.

'Oh, granny!' cried Joyce, 'what is that to me, if they are old or young? This one asked me—granny. listen ! listen ! for my heart is beating hard, and I must get some one to listen to me ;—he asked me, where I had got my name,—who had given me my name? with a look—oh, if I could let you see his look !. Not as some do, just staring, which means nothing but folly—but a look that made his eyes open wide, and the colour go out of his face.'

'It was just very impudent of any man to look at you like that.'

'No, it was not impudent. He was an old man with a sweet face, as if he was somebody's father—some girl's father that is my age. And he asked me, "Young lady" (he did not know who I was)—"young lady, where did you get your name?"'

The terms of this address moved Janet much more than the meaning. 'Well, I'll not say that I'm surprised : for if ever there was a young lass that looked like a lady, no to flatter ye—for flattery's no my way——'

'Granny, granny, you don't see what I mean. It was not me that he was thinking of. He was wondering to hear me called Joyce ; and he knew somebody—he knew—some one that was like me—that had the same name.'

Old Janet paused in the act of pouring out the tea. 'I mind now,' she said. 'There was somebody asking me where ye got it,—if it was a name in the family ; but I took no thought. Bless me ! can ye no be contented with them that have done their best for you all your life?'

'I am very well contented,' said Joyce ; but the involuntary movement of her mouth contradicted her words. She added, after a little pause, 'No one is so well off as I am. I have the kind of

work I like, and my big girls that learn so well, and you, granny dear, that are always so kind.'

'Kind!' said the old woman, with quick offence; 'if you think I'm wanting to be thought kind——'

'But I should like,' said Joyce, who in the meantime had been murmuring something to herself about the 'Happy Warrior,' and had not given much attention to this disclaimer—'oh, I should like to hear who I am,—to hear something about *her*, to know——' She paused, as if words were insufficient to express her thoughts, with a thrill of meaning more intense than anything she could say, quivering in her lips:

'Oh ay,' said Janet, 'I ken what you mean; to hear that you were born a grand lady, though you've been bred up a cottage lass; that you're Leddy Joyce or maybe Princess—how can I tell?—instead of just what you are, Joyce Matheson, that has made herself very weel respectit, and a' her ain doing—which is a far greater credit than to be born a queen.'

'Granny, you whip me, but it's with roses—no, not roses, for there are thorns to them, but lily flowers. Oh no, not Lady Joyce, nor anything of the kind,' she went on, with a tell-tale blush suddenly dyeing her pale face. 'I might have thought that when I was young—but not now. It is only a kind of yearning to know—to know—I cannot tell what I want to know—about my mother,' she added in a lower tone.

'Bairn,' said Janet, 'let that be—let it be. Poor young thing, she's been long long in her Maker's hands, and a' forgotten and forgiven.'

'If there was anything to forget and forgive; you take that for granted, granny!' cried the girl, with a sudden flush of indignation.

'Onything to forgive? There's aye plenty to forgive even to the best; but oh, J'yce, my poor lassie, take my advice and let it be. Many strange things happen in this world: but a poor thing that wanders into a strange place her lane with no a living creature to care if she lives or dies—oh, J'yce, my bonnie bairn, let it be!'

Joyce had risen, as if the remark was intolerable, and stood at the window looking out blankly. It was a discussion which had taken place often before, and always with the same result. Old Mrs. Matheson took, as was natural, the matter-of-fact view of the question, and felt a certainty that shame as well as sorrow must be involved in the secret of Joyce's birth, and that to inquire into it was very undesirable. But, as was equally natural, Joyce,

since she had been old enough to understand, had built a hundred castles in the air on the subject of her birth, and occupied many an hour with dreams of perhaps a father who should come and seek her, perhaps a mother's mother, like an old queen—people who would be noble in look and thought—perhaps, who could tell, in birth too? The Lady Joyce, with which old Janet taunted her, had not been altogether a fiction. Who could say? Mysteries were more common among the great than among the small, the girl said to herself. And how many romances are there in which such a story appears? There was the 'Gentle Shepherd,' the one poem beside Burns and Blair's 'Grave,' which was to be found in the cottage, and which she had known by heart almost before she could speak. Was not the shepherd Patie a gentleman? all the time and Peggy a lady? and both of them in their first estate full of poetry, and distinguished among their seeming peers, as Joyce was well aware she had always been?

By some strange grace of nature Joyce had escaped the self-conceit which is so common to the self-taught, so usual, must we say it, in Scotland? Her consciousness of being able to do a great many things as other people could not do them, got vent in a little innocent astonishment at the other people, who either were dull beyond what is permitted, or would not 'give their thoughts' to the proper subjects. She grew impatient by times with their determined stupidity, but thought it their fault, and not any special gift of hers that made the difference. It was for this reason that she had very sedately accepted the addresses of Mr. Andrew Halliday, who was schoolmaster in the next parish. He was a young man who was full of intellectual ambitions. He could talk of books, and quote poetry as long and as much as any one could desire. Joyce had been moved by enthusiasm on their first acquaintance. She had felt herself altogether lifted out of the vulgarities of common life, when he talked about Shakespeare and Shelley, and Scott and Burns—and with a little smiling commendation, as from a superior altitude, even of the 'Gentle Shepherd.' It sobered her a little to find that, like the other 'lads' in the village, he was intent upon a 'lass,' and that she was the object of his choice. But she gave in to it with dignity, feeling that he was indeed the only person with whom she could mate; and looked forward to the career of the schoolmistress, the schoolmaster's wife, with an adaptation to herself of the now so well-worn lines of the 'Happy Warrior,' which Joyce was not aware anybody had ever appropriated before. Yes; she would work out her life upon the plan which had pleased her childish thought. For it had been

her ambition since ever she began to be able to do and learn so many things which the girls around her would not in their invincible ignorance be persuaded to attempt to do—to coax, or drag, or force them into better things. Who but a teacher who would never let them rest, who would give them no peace till they understood, could do that? And she was resolved to do it, with a hope that Providence might throw in the possibility of something heroical—the saving of somebody's life, the redemption of some one who was going wrong—to make up. This was all laid out before her, the career which was to be hers.

But nevertheless (though she had abandoned all that folly about the Lady Joyce), when her mind was free, and nothing before her that compelled her attention, the romance of her unknown origin would come in, with a hundred vague attractions; and Colonel Hayward's question was more than enough to call everything back. 'Young lady, where did you get your name?' and then his look! She had caught that look again, constantly coming back to her. Joyce was well enough aware what looks of admiration are like. She had met them of every kind—the innocent, the modest, the bold—but this was not one of them; not even the fatherly kind, of which she had been conscious too. This look was very different: it was the look of a man so startled, so absorbed, that he could think of nothing else; and then he had said, 'I once knew—some one'—Joyce stood and listened, yet did not listen to what old Janet went on saying behind. The old woman was launched on a subject which filled her with eloquence. She was jealous of the poor little mother who had died—jealous at least of the idea that somebody might arrive some fine morning who would turn out to have a better claim than herself upon her nursling. In her heart Janet had always been certain that this was what would happen some day. She had spoken of it freely when the child was young, bidding Peter, her husband, to 'haud a loose grip.' 'We maunna think too much of her,' she had said; 'for just when we're bound up in her, and canna do without her, her ain kith and kin will come and carry her away.' She had gone on saying this until the slumbering light in Joyce's eyes had leaped out, and her quick intelligence had seized upon the expectation; after which Janet had changed her tone. She went on now in a very different strain, while Joyce stood at the window turning her back. 'If I were in your place,' she was saying, 'I wouldna hear a word—no a word—that would maybe make me think shame o' my mother. Oh, I wouldna listen—no, if it was the Queen hersel!' Joyce made no reply to these exhortations, but her heart burned. Her imagi-

nation rejected the idea with a fervour of suppressed indignation and resentment, which it needed all her gratitude and affection to keep in check. She stood and looked out, her foot tapping impatiently on the floor, her hand on the window. It was hard, very hard, to keep silent, though it was her duty so to do.

'Granny,' she said at last, 'say no more, please. For one thing, I cannot bear it—and for another, here is Miss Greta, and I think she is coming to our door.'

'Miss Greta! They might have kept her to her ain right name, which is a hantle bonnier than ony of your outlandish names; but she's very free to come and very welcome, and grand company for you—I'm aye glad to see her coming here! is that her at the door? Come in, come in, my bonnie ledly. Joyce was just telling me—and we're just awfu' fain to see you, both her and me.'

'Oh, thank you, Mrs. Matheson. Joyce! you are to come up to the house to-night,' said the young lady, coming in, in the gaiety of her pretty summer dress, like a sunbeam. 'Aunt Margaret has sent me to tell you: and I've run half the way, but I could not catch you up; you are to come to-night.'

Once more Joyce became crimson with expectation and excitement. Her eyes seemed to send out eager questions, and her lips to repeat the answer before the question was made. 'What is it?' she asked. 'Has the gentleman——' and then stopped short, devouring the young visitor with eager eyes.

'We want to have tableaux,' cried the girl; 'it was you yourself that put it into our heads: and you must come and help us—we could do nothing without you. Joyce, we want to do Queen Margaret—the same scene we had on the lawn for one. Captain Bellendean said it was beautiful: and then—something else. You are the one that knows all about Queen Margaret, Joyce.'

While Greta made her little speech, with a wondering sense after a word or two that she had stumbled into the midst of some dramatic scene which she did not understand, the face of Joyce was like a changing sky, save that the changes upon it were of swifter operation than those which alter the face of the heavens. It was full of a brilliant glow and flush of expectation at first: then the clouds suddenly swept over it, extinguishing all the higher lights: and then the shadows in their turn wavered and broke, and a chill clearness of self-repression came in their place, a calm which was like the usual calm of the countenance in repose, but intensified by the fact that this repose was not that of nature but of a violent effort, and had in it the gleam of self-scorn which

answered in a certain vivid paleness to the effect of the light. A few instants were enough to work out all this drama, which was the truest reflection of Joyce's mind. For one wild moment of hope, she had thought with a kind of certainty that her patroness, 'the lady,' the source of so many pleasures in Joyce's life, was sending for her to tell her that her anticipations were realised, that her birth and kindred were discovered, and that she was to be told who she was. So swift are the operations of the mind that in her instantaneous conception of this, Joyce had time to make sure that there was no shame but only happiness in the revelation about to be made, or Mrs. Bellendean, always kind, would not have sent for her in this marked way. The thought sent the blood dancing through her veins, and though, perhaps, she did not picture herself as Lady Joyce, her mind yet rushed towards unknown glories in which insignificance at least had no place. And then there came a sense of absolute and sickening disappointment, such as seems to check the very fountains of life—disappointment so overwhelming that she felt herself stand up merely like a piece of mechanism by no strength or will of her own—a state of mental collapse from which she awoke to such scorn of herself for her former incoherent hopes as brought the blood to her cheeks again.

It takes longer time to describe these varying moods than it did to go through them, one sensation sweeping through her mind after the other. She had come to herself again after mounting to those heights and descending to those depths, when she replied, rather coldly, vaguely, to Greta's petition, 'If I can get away—if I can be spared from home.'

'Spared from home! oh ay, she can be spared, Miss Greta, weel spared. She is aye so busy and taken up with thae bairns that a little pleasure will just do her a great deal of good.'

'Pleasure!' said Joyce, echoing the word. 'I will come if the lady wants me; but there is a good deal to do—things to prepare. And then—and then——' She paused with a conscious effort, making the most of her hindrances—'I am expecting a friend to-night.'

'A friend?—that will be Andrew Halliday,' said the old woman, again interposing anxiously; 'you can see him any day of the week; he's no that far away nor sweared to come. Where are your manners, Joyce? to keep Miss Greta standing, and hum and ha, as if ye werena aye ready to do what will pleasure the lady—aye ready, night or day.'

'If Joyce is tired, Mrs. Matheson,' said Greta, 'I will not have

her troubled. But are you really so tired, Joyce? We cannot do anything without you. And it was all my idea, for there is no party or anything: but I thought it would please—all of them. Only I could do nothing without you.'

'Yes, yes, I am coming,' cried Joyce suddenly; 'I was only what granny calls cankered and out of heart.'

'Why should you be out of heart,' said the other girl, 'when everything went so well and everybody was so pleased? It is perhaps because you will miss Mr. Halliday? But then he can come up for you, and it's moonlight, and that will be better than sitting in the house. Don't you think so, Joyce?'

'The moonlight is fine coming down the avenue,' Joyce said vaguely. And then she asked, 'Will the old Colonel—the old gentleman—will he be there?'

'Oh, did you take a fancy to him, Joyce? So have I. Yes, he will be there—they will all be there. We are to have it in the great drawing-room—and leave to rummage in all the presses in the red room, you know, where the old Lady's dresses are kept, and to take what we like.'

'That would be fine,' said Joyce, 'if it was for last century; but if Queen Margaret is what you are wanting, that's far, far back, and the old Lady's dresses will do little good. There will be nothing half so old as Queen Margaret——'

'Oh,' cried Greta, her countenance falling, 'I never thought of that.'

Joyce hesitated a moment, and the light returned to her eyes. 'I will go up with you to the house now, if granny can spare me, and I will speak to Merritt, and we will think, she and I; and when you come out from your dinner we will have settled something. Oh, never fear but we will find something. It is just what I like,' said Joyce, restored to full energy—'to make out what's impossible. That's real pleasure!' she cried, with sparkling eyes.

'Did ever any mortal see the like,' said Janet to herself as she stood at the door watching the two girls go down the village street. 'What's impossible! that's just what she likes, that wonderful bairn. And if onybody was to ask which was the leddy, it's our Joyce and not Miss Greta that ilka ane would say. But, eh me! though I am so fain to get her a bit pleasure, what's to come o' a' that if she is just to settle doon and marry Andrew Halliday? That's what is impossible, and nae pleasure in it so far as I can see!'

CHAPTER V

THE tableaux had taken place to everybody's satisfaction. There had been much applause, and Joyce had been called for to receive the thanks of the audience; but all muffled up in a dark cloak in which she had figured as one of Queen Margaret's travelling retinue, she had not revealed anything to the amused look of the gentlemen and ladies who were spectators, except a dark and indistinct outline against the light. When the others, throwing off the veils and cloaks in which she had enveloped them, joined their friends in the drawing-room, which was to Joyce the emblem of everything that was most splendid and beautiful in the world, she stole away, getting her hat from Merritt's room. Merritt would gladly have detained her for a gossip afterwards; but Joyce, though she told herself with an angry humility, which was more stinging than pride, that it was Merritt who was her equal and not Greta, would not stay. She went out into the silence of the night, hearing the voices of the company, with a keen desire to know what they were saying, and to share in the enjoyment which imagination represented to her as so much more delightful than any kind of social intercourse she had ever known. Joyce felt this with a sharp and keen sensation which she said to herself was not envy. Oh no, no! for envy is unkind, whereas she desired no harm, but only good and every pleasantness to the delightful company where there were so many whom she was fond of; but only a forlorn consciousness of her own position as one who could not get access there, yet was at home nowhere else. No; all that youthful folly about Lady Joyce was nonsense, she knew. She would never be Lady Joyce, never find a place in the Queen's Court, or among the people who are grand and great, and the flower of the land; but yet there was her place, and nowhere else was she at home.

She did not venture to say this to herself, yet the thought was

in her mind as she stepped out with a sigh down the terrace steps, leaving the lights blazing, and the voices, so refined, as she thought, and delightful, rising in a soft tumult behind. She was tempted to steal along the terrace to an open window, to hear what they were saying, to peep in for a moment out of the gloom. But Joyce would not, could not do this thing. The temptation wounded her pride even while it moved her. What! she, Joyce, go and peep and listen, like a waiting-maid in a play! No, no; though they were so sweet, though they drew her as if with a magnet—no, no. She turned round resolutely away from this snare. On the other side the housekeeper's room was shining too, and there was quite a fine company there—the ladies'-maids so fine, and gentlemen in evening clothes, quite equal to anything that was to be seen in the drawing-room. Joyce flung her head high—not there at least! though with a keen pang of self-humiliation she felt that there everybody would think was her appropriate place. But the fine ladies'-maids were too fine for her. There was something in that. It enabled her to feel a consolatory thrill of disdainful pride.

When she had gone on a little, and reached the beginning of the avenue, a shadow shaped itself out of the darkness of the night, and a shawl, unnecessary and undesired, was quickly put upon her shoulders. 'I was told to bring you this—and I've been waiting half an hour. Oh, keep it on, the night is chilly—to please me, Joyce.'

'Why should you make me do what I don't wish, to please you?'

'Well, if it is what you don't wish; but consider that your health is of great consequence, and if you were to catch cold—or any unpleasant thing——'

'There could not be a better time,' said Joyce, 'at the beginning of the holidays.'

'Has something gone wrong with you to-night?—you are not as sweet as your ordinary—oh yes—sweet always, sweet ever to me. But something has come over you. You are so merry about them sometimes. You make me laugh, though I am not sure that it is right to laugh at the aristocracy—they have their difficulties, as we have ours.'

'I wonder at you! Wherein are they different?—the same flesh and blood, I hope—no better education, often not so good. What then? Who was it they referred to for everything to-night?—to know all about the story and the history: the history of their own country, and we in sight of the very scene! Who did

they come to ask from as if I were an oracle? and you say that knowledge is power——'

'Yes, in a way, assuredly it is. There is a moral superiority; there is a sense of true nobility——'

'Oh, stop, stop! In spite of all, if I had stayed there,' cried Joyce, with an indignant sweeping motion of her arm towards the lighted windows, which now shone like faint stars in the distance, 'should I have been like them? They would have talked and been kind; they would have asked me questions. What would you like, Joyce?—a cup of tea? Have you seen these pictures, Joyce? What can we show her to amuse her? And a gentleman would have come forward and said something, looking as if he were afraid I would curtsy when I spoke to him, like one of the children! and there would be little looks at me as if it were wonderful I could behave myself. And the lady herself, who is all goodness—yes, she is all goodness!—would give me a glance after a while, or perhaps a whisper, Now, Joyce, run away. Why—why should it be—so little difference, and yet so much? To feel nothing but scorn at the thought they are our betters, and yet never to feel at ease with them!' Her foot gave an impatient mortified stamp on the ground, and her eyes, unseen, overflowed with hot and angry tears.

'These are questions which are sometimes painful—but not necessarily so,' said the young schoolmaster. 'Take hold of my arm going down the avenue. Oh do! It is dark, and you might stumble, and the moon gives little light under the trees. And then, don't you think I have a right to a little, just a little, kindness, more than everybody else? Well, then,' he went on in a satisfied tone, as Joyce, moved by this argument, conceded the arm, though with some reluctance. 'I will tell you all about it. It would be painful if it were not looked at from a high point of view. It is mortifying when there is no difference—when you are just as well instructed, perhaps better, and acquainted with all the rules of politeness, and even etiquette, and all the rest of it'—Joyce moved uneasily, impatiently, on his arm, and he had to hold her fast to retain it—'to feel that there is a difference!' he went on hastily; 'and founded upon nothing reasonable, upon no solid ground. For to call them our betters is folly. Wherein are they our betters? not in acquaintance with everything that is best—with literature, with science, with what Tennyson calls the long results of time.'

'If you think you are explaining, you are making a mistake,' said Joyce,—'you are only repeating what I said.'

The young schoolmaster laughed, but with confusion and a little resentment. 'I am coming to the explanation,' he said. 'For one thing, it's against our dignity, yours and mine, that are just as good as they are, to take offence. It's a pitiful thing to take offence.'

He said 'pitiful,' and now and then made other betrayals in accent of his northern origin; but that was nothing, for some of the gentlemen did the same. This thought flew through Joyce's mind with the rapidity of light, followed, like its attendant shadow, by another, a painful, hateful consciousness of this involuntary proof of the differences which they were discussing. The gentlemen! Why or how this distinction, which she herself made without knowing? In the darkness, unsuspected of her companion, who was going on quite easily, she blushed to her hair, to her heels, with a glow all over her.

'But we must reflect,' he said, 'that in this world there must always be a certain sacrifice to appearances. And it's more lovely and of good report to keep up different grades. Abstract justice is one thing, but fair-seeming also has to be considered. An aristocracy is a graceful thing. People like us, that consider these matters, may well consent to keep it up for the beauty of it. We cultivate flowers for the same end. It would be more profitable to fill all the garden beds with cabbages or gooseberries. We yield that for beauty, and we yield the other too. And then you and I, Joyce,' he said, pressing her arm, 'we have the advantage or the disadvantage, whichever you like to call it, of belonging to an exceptional class.'

Here again a murmur made itself heard in Joyce's mind. Did *he*? For herself she made no question. She put him in her mind beside Captain Bellendean,—the Captain, as everybody called him—and her brain grew confused. But Halliday continued, with an equable sense of giving instruction, which confused her more and more.

'We are, so to speak, everybody's equal,' he said. 'We are probably superior to most of these people, but we are not going to compete with them in their way. There is no doubt that we are superior to the other classes, who cannot, in any manner, hold their own with us, except just by sheer force of money, or something of that measurable kind. We have therefore a rank—a rank, Joyce, that is by itself, that is becoming more and more acknowledged every day.'

He pressed her arm as he spoke, and she, wildly roving in her mind through every kind of bye-way of thought, did not like it,

but made no sign, restraining herself, answering nothing, which was not Joyce's way. She was thus caught and attached to reality, while her mind went wandering through space, in no way agreeing in the supposed triumphant argument of his—sometimes flashing a contradiction upon him which he could not see; chafing at the restraint; eager to throw him off, yet not doing so; held fast by circumstances and her fate.

'When you and I set up together, Joyce,' he said, clasping her arm closer, 'which I hope will be soon, for I'm weary waiting—when you and I have our home together, we'll have a home where any one may be proud to come to; where every meal will be a feast, and nothing spoken of or thought of that is not high—above the ideas of the common. We'll have nothing common there. We'll talk of the grandest things. We'll be better than princes or kings; and by and by, when the world's a little wiser—as we're making it wiser every day—when a great statesman comes to Mid-Lothian, or a great scholar or a poet, it's you and me he'll come to. We'll not have grand rooms to put him in, but it's with us he'll find the minds to understand him. Even now, if Tennyson were to be up yonder,' he pointed back to the house—'would he care for them, who could not quote a line he ever wrote, or us, who could say—what could we not say?—all his poems, I believe between you and me.'

At this Joyce laughed aloud with a sudden burst of ridicule. 'Do you think he would care to hear his own poems? I think he would rather go up to the house, where nobody would be afraid of him.'

'Afraid of him! why should we be afraid? I hope our manners are good enough for—as good as——'

'Oh, what do you mean about manners? doesn't that just prove what I say?—we should be afraid of him. We could quote all his poems one after another. What would he care for that? Miss Greta, that knows none of them, except perhaps the Queen of the May, would please him better. Why? Oh, how can I tell you? but *I know it!* She would know the people he knows; and, don't you see, when you speak about manners, that alone shows—— Oh yes, we are different, and that is the truth. We may know more—and we might know double again, and it would not make any difference. There is more in it than that.'

'Yes, there is money in it, if that is what you mean,' said the schoolmaster scornfully.

'That is not what I mean; but it's true—there is money in it—and beautiful rooms, and people that have lived in them all their

life, and their fathers before them, and that are used to be the best wherever they go. We say we're the best, but we're not used to it. It is in our thoughts, but not in other people's. Oh, there is a difference! I feel I don't belong to the cotters' houses, but I am at ease in them: and in the farmers' I feel—oh, a little queerish, as if I were smiling at their money and their notion that they were better than me—superior as you say. But in Bellendean I would be awkward and blush. I would say, Thank you, mem, or sir. Perhaps I could talk better than the rest if I were to try——'

'You could—you could.'

'What would that matter?' cried this stern philosopher. 'I would be just Joyce Matheson among them all. But here I'm not Joyce Matheson, I'm—anything. I'm Desdemona or even Rosalind. I'm Lady Joyce, as granny says. I'm no match for any but a prince—oh, Andrew!—what I meant to say was that in my thoughts I'm a grand lady, but in Bellendean, nobody—nobody! a little schoolmistress, a little country girl.'

'I know what you mean,' he said, recovering the hand she had drawn from his arm. 'But if you love me, Joyce, I'm prince enough for anything,' he said in a lower tone.

This touch of feeling suddenly coming in silenced Joyce. She made no reply. Love had been little talked of between them. They had thought more of Shakespeare and the poets generally, and of that culture which levels all distinctions, and makes of those who are engaged 'in tuition' the superiors of the world. There was always this strange question, too, so little explicable, of class distinctions, which contradicted all theories, and set culture aside as if it meant nothing. They were both aristocrats by birth, holding fondly to the doctrine of a superior race, but feeling also a wistful, nay, sometimes angry, wonder why their own special affinities for that race were not more justly recognised.

'After all, the class that we belong to is the greatest of all,' said Halliday. 'The greatest men have come out of it. The peasant is a kind of king. He has nothing to do with money-making, and poor sordid trades. He digs his bread out of the soil. However we may get up and up, we have no reason to be ashamed of him. In the cottages you are at your ease, you said——'

'But not because I belong to them,' cried Joyce, with a flash of her eyes. 'If I did, I would not say so; it would be natural. But I don't: I belong to nobody: if I were a peasant, I would be a peasant and nothing more; but I am nobody, and I think and think—and sometimes I have silly dreams.'

He tried again to take her hand. 'Not silly, perhaps,' he said; 'the world is before us. I see nothing that we might not do—you and me together, Joyce.'

You and me together! This was not what she was thinking of. The vague exaltation and vaguer hope which sometimes swept her up to heights unknown had nothing to do, it must be confessed, with Andrew Halliday. She drew herself apart from him, on the evident ground that they were emerging from the darkness of the avenue into the bright moonlight at the park gates. The village street opened beyond, with various groups about enjoying the freshness of the night. The women were out at their doors; a knot of men smoking their pipes and talking in their slow rustic way, stood together at a corner. Without a doubt, there were two or three pairs, not so bashful as Joyce, taking advantage of the moonlight. But it was in conformity with Halliday's principles as well as her own to maintain the loftiest decorum. They walked down side by side, with quiet gravity and propriety, talking of what Mr. Halliday called 'the topics of the day': the success of all the festivities in honour of the Captain's return, the Captain himself and his character, and other cognate subjects,—a kind of conversation which anybody might have listened to with edification. Indeed, even in the avenue, where it was dark, and Joyce's arm was in that of her lover, the talk had not been any drivel of love-making, as the reader knows. But Joyce had not said a word to him of the excitement which lay deep at the bottom of her heart. She had never said a word to Halliday of the commotions which the thought of her possible origin awoke; and of Colonel Hayward and his strange questions and looks she had said nothing. All this was kept a secret from her lover; she kept it jealously, but she could scarcely have told why.

Old Peter Matheson stood at his door, in the full light of the moon, which threw all the roughnesses upon his surface into shadow, as if he had been a mountain. He was a mountain in his way, or rather an angular tall old crag, his face seamed as with torrents. The moon subdued the high colour, the deep frosty-red and russet-brown of his weather-beaten countenance, and made his scanty circle of white locks like a silver crown. He was standing in the middle filling up the doorway, with a lordly indifference to his wife, who stood spying at the moonlight from under his arm.

'You'll be them,' Janet had said, as the two slim figures suddenly rose out of the white distance.

'How can ye tell it's them? It might be onybody,' said Peter, in his deep voice.

'Wha would it be but them? It's no the Captain and some young lady—therefore,' said Janet, 'it's bound to be our twa. There's nae ither twa like them. And I would ken our Joyce at ten mile.'

Peter grumbled something about the impossibility of seeing anything except the hills or the sea at ten miles, and about the nonsensical character of her remarks generally. But with a swelling at his old heart which almost brought the water to his eyes (not hard to do), decided that she was right, and that Joyce could be distinguished as far as mortal vision would carry. The way she stepped, and the carriage of her—like a lady! she was just like the Queen!

'Sac it's you after a'. I was thinking nae ither pair would move along like twa steeples, nae nearer. Come away. It's a bonnie night, but I'm wantin' my supper. I canna fill my wame with the moonlicht, like you twa.'

'Is it late, grandfather? I might have known it was late, as it's so dark, or would be but for the moon.'

'Na, na,' said the old man, with a laugh as deep and bass as his voice; 'it wasna to be expected you should mind. We're no lookin' for impossibilities. But there is a fine smell of stoved ta'aties. Your granny is a woman that loses no time.'

'Now that they are come,' said Janet from within, 'come in, come in to your supper. Dinna stand and chatter there.'

The supper was simple enough. There were oatcakes and cheese on the table, a large dish of stoved potatoes, steaming and savoury, and a jug of milk. The potatoes were a feast for a king; the steam of them rose like domestic incense to the dim roof. The table was set as far from the fire as possible, the door left open, the moonlight, silver to the threshold, stopped about a yard within, drawing a clear line of separation between its intense ethereal whiteness and the ruddy light of the little lamp. Joyce sat facing the moonlight, looking out across the homely table into that mystic world outside: conscious of the contrast between the little human group, so well defined and distinct, the smoky lamp-light on their faces, and the great universe beyond, all filled with spiritual light, with moving shadows and subdued voices—mystic, mysterious. Now and then a step passed, the line of some fitting figure crossed the doorway, and sometimes a cheerful voice called 'Good-night' at them in passing, while the talk went on within.

'Weel, and did a' yon nonsense come to pass, and were ye satisfied?' Janet asked.

'Yes, granny; pretty well. Everybody was pleased.'

'Except yoursel', ye exacting-thing! They wouldna do just a' ye told them, that would be the cause.'

'J'yce is a lass that likes her ain gait. Ye manna gang into it wi' your eyes blindfold, Andrew, my man.'

'Yes, they did what I told them, granny. But the Scots maidens could hardly be distinguished from the Saxon maidens, which was a mistake; and we could not get anything like right costume, there was so little time. But they knew no better,' said Joyce, with a slight inflection of contempt; 'they were quite pleased.'

'And that is a very difficult question,' said the schoolmaster. 'Do you think there would be much difference at that early period?'

'What!' cried Joyce, lighting up, 'between the Saxon ladies that were with the Athelings, that had been in a Court, and the wives of the wild Picts, or whatever they were—for history knows little of them—on the other side!'

'And what were you?' said Janet, while Peter burst into one of his long, derisive, admiring laughs, with a 'Hearken to her!' which brought the water to his eyes.

'I was nobody. I was a tirewoman. I was not thinking of *me*. I was in the lady's train in her journey, with a big cloak of the Captain's,' said Joyce, permitting herself to laugh.

'And wherefore no' a Scots lady, to wait upon her in her kingdom,' said Janet, half offended. 'You have aye an awfu' troke with thae English, as if you liked them the best.'

'How can she do that when she never kent ane?' said Peter, in his innocence.

But Joyce made no reply.

CHAPTER VI

COLONEL HAYWARD was in waiting on the platform at Edinburgh when the morning express came in from the south. It was a lovely morning. The unconventional freshness, as of a day still in its childhood and doubting nothing, was in the air, even in the grimy precincts of the railway station, where all was black below, yet all fresh above, the sun shining, the air full of that keen sweetness which, even in a July morning, breathes in the air of the north. The platform was already full of people waiting for their friends; and when those friends arrived, and came pouring from all the carriage doors, with the noise combined of a crowd and a train, the Colonel was confused by the din and numbers. Though he had the habit of command, and could have made his authority felt in a moment had they been soldiers under him, he was pushed out of his way by women and children and railway porters, without power of asserting himself; and therefore it was not till most of the passengers had poured out of the train, that he got to the particular object of his search—a small, very bright-eyed woman, who stood in the door of the carriage she had travelled in, looking out calmly upon the confused scene. She was not grimy, as most of the passengers were, or untidy with the night's travelling, or hurried and flustered as everybody else was. She stood calmly looking down from the height of the doorway, quite patient and composed. She knew that the Colonel would come: she knew that he was not very good at pushing his way: therefore she possessed her soul in patience, making no fuss, showing no anxiety about her box, calm, commanding the situation. 'Ah, here you are,' she said quietly, as he came up to her, stepping lightly down.

'Have you been waiting long, my dear?'

'Oh, no; it didn't matter. I knew you would come. I have one box, and I know exactly where it is. Don't let us hurry. I don't suppose there is any hurry.'

'No—perhaps not,—but something very serious, very serious, Elizabeth.'

'I suppose so, or you would not have sent for me. Wait till we get out of the noise. I could not hear you, so what would be the use? We are going to a hotel, I suppose?'

'We are going to Bellendean, where I am staying. Don't be surprised.'

'But I am surprised, Henry. To the great house you wrote to me about? full of ladies? You forget——'

'I—forget? No; I forget nothing—all you have done for me, your kindness, your patience.'

The little lady took him by the arm, with a look of alarm in her face. She had already sighted her box, and in the course of her dialogue with her husband, had managed telegraphically to secure a porter and a cab. Evidently she was of the order of women who take care of others, and do not expect to be taken care of. She led him towards the cab, as if a little afraid of his sanity. 'Where is he to drive to? tell him,' she said, keeping a close hold to the Colonel's arm. She held him fast still, when they were seated together, until they had got clear of the tumult of the railway station. 'Now,' she said, 'tell me. It must be something very much out of the ordinary when you talk of my kindness, Henry. My kindness!' In this Mrs. Hayward resembled old Janet Matheson. It was an offence to her to be praised in that way.

'My dear,' he said, 'I am more perplexed than I can tell you. You will say I have often been perplexed before, when you saw little cause for it; and this is why I sent for you so suddenly; for if anybody can bring light out of darkness, it is you.'

'What is it? I am very willing to be sent for, Henry; the only difficulty is going to this house, when you know my principle, and how long I have kept out of all invitations and acquaintances.'

'You that would shine anywhere!' said the Colonel, with the water in his eyes, 'and all for my sake.'

She looked at him again for a moment with a sort of consternation. 'There you are making a mistake, my dear—for my own. Because I did not choose that there should ever be a remark.'

He put his hand upon her arm with a heavy pressure. 'Elizabeth, I am dreadfully perplexed; but I think, if I am not wrong, that I have come upon the settlement of all that question; of everything—of what has hung over us. I think, my dear, that all is right—that all has been right from the very beginning.'

He stopped a little, and then added, drawing a long breath, 'I never had any doubt of it myself.'

A gleam, half of anger, half of fun, darted up into her bright eyes, and flashed like an arrow of light at him, which the good man did not even see, and which ended, on her part, with a quick laugh, in which there was a little amusement, a little excitement, though not very much expectation. 'You never had any doubt !' she said. Then she added, with a half sigh of impatience—'Tell me all about your new discovery, and we'll pull it to pieces and see if there's anything in it. Have we a long drive before us ? Is there time to get it all out ?'

'Plenty of time ; and, oh, the comfort to know that you are here, and to be able to tell you ! I will do what you like best, Elizabeth. I will tell you all the facts, and then you can judge for yourself. I came to Bellendean, you know, nearly a week ago. There has been all sorts of things going on. Great dinners, and all the fine people of the county—and then the tenantry. It is a—a tidy estate—a number of tenants—not small farms like what we are used to, but men, you know, whom really I should have taken for country gentlemen—men paying big rents, and able to make speeches—and—and that sort of thing.'

Mrs. Hayward kept her eyes upon her husband's face. She was used, it was evident, to long explanations, and expected them, and had learned that patience which comes of necessity. He knew this fact, that she always heard him out, and never interrupted him, as other people did. But what he did not know, was that a thrill of natural impatience, never altogether overcome, was in the veins of the little woman who sat by him, keeping him to the point with her eyes, never interrupting him in any other way. 'Yes,' she said, when he paused to take breath : but that was all.

'Yes ; and then, last of all, there was a supper to the labourers and cottagers. Well, no, not exactly last of all, for the last was the children's entertainment—the school-feast we should have called it, but they don't say school-feast here—a sort of gathering in the afternoon, you know, with a band and games, and tea in a great tent, and—you know ?'

'Yes, I know what a school-feast is.'

'Well !'—he drew a long breath now, and settled himself down in a manner which betokened, as his wife by long experience knew, that he was about coming to the point ; but she could scarcely believe it after so short a preamble. 'The first thing that happened was at the labourers' supper : we were all walking about, and I for my part said a word now and then, while they were

cheering Norman Bellendean—that he was a good fellow, you know, and all that—the sort of thing one would say at an affair of the kind, when you do think well of the fellow, you know, and get into the swim——’

‘Yes?’ said Mrs. Hayward again.

‘Well then. I had the very words in my mouth, when at the end of one of the tables, between an old man and an old woman, evidently cottagers, I saw—I declare to you, Elizabeth, my heart leapt into my mouth—I was choked, I could not say another syllable. I saw her as clear as I see you.’

‘Whom did you see, Henry?’

‘Joyce!’ He got out the word with difficulty, and, taking out his handkerchief, fanned himself, puffing forth a hot breath of excitement. His bronzed face took a coppery tone in the heat of his reawakened feelings; and this time Mrs. Hayward did not retain her usual calm. She repeated the cry, ‘Joyce!’ with a tone of mingled astonishment and dismay—‘Joyce!—then why in the name of heaven did you bring *me* here?’

‘Stop a minute, stop a minute, Elizabeth: you have not heard all; and how is it possible you could understand? I have described her to you often. It was as if I saw her, exactly as I had seen her last—the same looks, the same age.’

‘You must be dreaming,’ cried his wife, almost with anger. ‘If she is living, according to all you have always said, she must be as old as I am——’

Sudden indignation seemed to burst from her in these words. She grew red, she grew pale. The impatience, so entirely concealed before, showed now in every finger, in every limb, mingled with angry surprise. ‘If you have sent for me, disturbed me, exposed me, only to tell me this at the end—that you saw her—the same age as you saw her last! I hope she has a good reason to give for all the misery she has caused—but the same age!’ Mrs. Hayward gasped, and said no more.

‘Ah,’ said the Colonel, shaking his head, ‘you don’t see, you don’t see! No more did I. I couldn’t say a word—I just stopped and stared—a young lady, clearly a lady, between the two old cottagers—and that look. Well! I came to myself, Elizabeth, and I thought it is just some chance resemblance, and I left the place: but disturbed—disturbed beyond what words could say. I got little sleep—you know how little sleep I get when I am upset.’

‘I know you think so,’ said his wife, in an undertone.

‘But in the morning I felt calm. I said to myself that it must

be some chance—— Of course there are people who are like each other all over the world. I knew myself, up in the Punjaub, a man—but that is neither here nor there. However, next day I was quite easy. I thought nothing more of it. And then there came the school-feast I told you of—well, the thing that was the same as a school-feast, though they didn't call it a school-feast, you know. I was walking about, thinking of nothing in particular, and of course it was daylight, and everything quite clear—when I saw that girl again.'

'Oh, you call her a girl now !' Mrs. Hayward said, with that air of resentment which he did not understand. He paused and looked at her with sudden anxiety.

'You are not feeling poorly, Elizabeth ? You are not overtired ? You are not——?' He could not say angry, it seemed ridiculous ; but his attention was roused, and nothing but her health could be the cause, he thought, of her change of tone.

'Go on,' she said, 'go on. I am not feeling anything—but a wish to know what you mean.'

There was a difference in her for all that. And if Elizabeth was going to fail him, what would become of him ? He gave her a serious, anxious, inquiring look. Then, in reply to an impatient movement on her part, continued—

'That's not all. I went and asked Mrs. Bellendean who she was—though I had scarcely breath to ask. Elizabeth—conceive what I felt when she turned round and called Joyce !'

'Joyce !—well I suppose you did not expect she had changed her name ?' She said this sharply ; then added, with an evident effort, 'My dear, I beg your pardon. I don't wonder you were upset. Joyce—and it is a name one never hears. Did she—know you ?'

'Know me ? She had never seen me, nor heard of me—how should she know me ? And I was left for a long time in a state I can't describe—wondering whether it could be a relation—God knows what I didn't think ! Everybody knew the girl. She was the schoolmistress, as it turned out, but a lady every inch of her. Everybody liked her, consulted her, clustered about her. I heard nothing but Joyce, Joyce, wherever I turned.'

Mrs. Hayward's impatience seemed to have died away. She patted his arm with her small hand, saying, 'Poor Henry !' with a tone of compunction in her pity. She had done him wrong, or else she had done wrong to Joyce. To Joyce—the very name, though she had heard it so often, was like an arrow quivering in her heart.

'Elizabeth, all that is as nothing to what I am going to tell you now. I want all your attention. I have waited till you came: I haven't even tried to think: I have said to myself, Elizabeth will know. Now you must give your mind to it, and tell me what to do. Elizabeth, this is the story I heard. Twenty years ago, just the date I've often told you—the date I remember so well—you know, my dear, you know——'

'Yes, I know.'

'Well!—Just then this girl's mother came to Bellendean—all by herself, going north, it was thought. She was going to have a baby——' The old Colonel here fell a trembling, and his wife took his hands and held them in her own, caressing them—two large brown tremulous hands—between her small white nervous ones. He leant back on her shoulder too, which was not half broad enough to support him. 'The short and the long is this: she had her baby, and she died. And the baby is Joyce—named after her mother; and there are clothes and letters to prove who she was——'

'My poor Henry! God help you, my dear! You have seen them? it was—she?'

'No—I haven't seen them. I hadn't the courage. I could think of nothing but you. You'll do it for me, Elizabeth? you'll see what you think. I—I couldn't look up the old things. I—couldn't—decide—I couldn't——'

He could do nothing but tremble, it seemed, and falter out these broken words, and lean back upon her, the colour going out of his face. She thought he was about to faint.

'Come, Henry, this will never do,' she said quickly. 'Rouse yourself, my dear fellow—rouse yourself up. We will bear it together, whatever it may be. And it doesn't seem, so far as I can see, as if there would be anything new to bear.'

'If it was so. She never told me, Elizabeth—that anything like that could happen.'

'Perhaps she did not know. You have always said she was young and inexperienced. Oh, poor thing! poor thing!'

He loosed his hands from hers, and suddenly threw his arms round her, enfolding her, with something like a sound of sobbing. 'If it was fault of mine, God forgive me! God forgive me! But, Elizabeth, my dear! it has always been all right between you and me—as I felt sure all along.'

Her bright eyes were for a moment dimmed too. She gave him a sudden light kiss upon his old cheek, and then softly detached herself. 'We will say no more about that just now. If

all this is as you think, Henry, there is something more important even than you and me—the girl.'

'Ah, the girl!' He spoke vaguely, as if his attention had been distracted from that part of the subject. 'You will see her,' he said, 'the very living image—and then the name—just as she was the last time I ever saw her. Elizabeth: you will understand the kind of creature she was—the—the impetuosity—the——'

'Don't dwell on all that, or you will upset yourself again. See her! of course I shall see her. You don't seem to realise what a wonderful change for her—and us too. But, don't you think it is you who ought to see her first and tell her—you who are, after all, the chief person——'

'I!' he cried with dismay, interrupting her. 'Why the chief person? Did I ever set myself up as the chief person? We have gone along with each other, Elizabeth, in everything that has been done.'

'Yes, but in the case of—Joyce.' She made a little pause before she said the name. 'Henry, Joyce, whether living or dead, must be yours—yours alone. She would have a right to complain if you left her to me.'

He caught her again, with an alarmed look, by her arm. 'Is there anything mine that is not yours too? Has there ever been anything of mine that was not yours? Don't go and make a separation just when—just when——'

'Separation! it is likely that I should make a separation,' she cried, with a laugh in which there was, though he was unconscious of it, a great deal of nervous excitement. Then she looked out of the carriage with a little cry of admiration: 'What is this? Have we got to Bellendean already? What beautiful trees! I did not know there were such fine trees in the north. And now I must think of meeting Mrs. Bellendean. Isn't it rather bold of you to bring me here?'

'Not bold at all. The invitation was from her. I did not ask for it. It was she herself—entirely she——'

'I know what you did,' said Mrs. Hayward, with a smile. 'You said, I wish Elizabeth were here. And she heard it, and suggested that you send for me. Most likely she was a little amused about Elizabeth. I know your way, and what the young fellows say, that you always want Elizabeth, whatever happens.'

'So I do—so I do; though I can't tell how they know, the jackanapes. Here we are at the door.'

'You must smuggle me upstairs before anybody sees me, for

I'm very untidy ; and I know how fresh they will all look in their morning things,' cried Mrs. Hayward, with a shade of disquietude in her eyes.

'Oh yes, you shall be smuggled upstairs,' cried the Colonel, confident in the security of the early hour. And presently the pair found themselves in the cheerful room prepared for the new-comer, with tea set out upon a table. Elizabeth took at once the command of the position. She gave him some tea, then dismissed him to an easy chair in his own room, which communicated with hers, where, as he began to doze, he could see her little figure moving about, appearing and disappearing, as she unpacked her things and made herself comfortable. She looked, he thought, as if she had been there all her life. It was a faculty peculiar to her. She made the barest barrack-room look like herself somehow, before she had been half an hour in it. Wherever she was, the place began to appear like home directly. He had the immense sense of relief which a man in charge of a difficult post feels on the arrival of his commanding officer who takes over the responsibility, and that delightful loosening of moral tension filled him with pleasant drowsiness. His eyes, half shut, half open, were conscious of her, and that everything was being looked after ; and, as a matter of fact, he had not slept well for two or three nights, though Elizabeth had scoffed at this. He had a most refreshing doze while she dressed and made herself look as fresh as the morning. As for her having been untidy, even after the night-journey, that was a thing impossible to Elizabeth. But he knew that she would come out looking fresher than the day.

She was a little woman of about forty-five, with the complexion of a girl, and eyes that were as blue as an infant's, but with the quality of brightness which belongs more frequently to a darker hue. Not soft and dreamy as blue eyes should be, but keen and clear, dancing with light—eyes which saw behind as well as before, and which nothing could clude. There was no sleep or weariness in them, but there was, visible to her own perception as she looked at herself in the glass, a keener glitter of uneasiness, a little curve of anxiety in the lids. He seemed to think only of this possible revelation of the past—which, no doubt, was important, very important ; but of the future, which she saw so distinctly opening upon them, a future entirely new, distracting, for which neither she nor he had any preparation, he seemed to take no thought. That was Henry's way, she said to herself, to be overwhelmed by one view of a question, which had half a dozen other aspects more important, and to make himself quite comfort-

able about it when the first shock was over, without an idea of what the consequences might be: dear old stupid that he was! She, too, glanced at him as she passed and repassed the doorway, with a tenderness in which there was a mixture of amusement and partial irritation and fun and sympathy, all mingled together. His goodness, his strength, his helplessness and confusion of mind, his high courage and authority and judgment, and his complete dependence and docility, were all so evident to those keen eyes of hers, which adored him, laughed at him, smote him with keen shafts of criticism, made haloes of glory about him all at one and the same moment. He had brought her many a ravelled skein to disentangle, but never any so serious as this. Joyce dead had been a shadow often discouraging upon her life, but Joyce living filled her lively soul with a shrinking of dismay. And of this he did not seem to have a thought.

CHAPTER VII

JANET MATHESON was busy with her broth, which was boiling softly, slowly over the fire, ready to receive the vegetables—red, white, and green—the carrots and turnips and early crisp cabbage, all nicely cut and glistening with freshness and cleanness, which she had just prepared to add to the contents of the pot. She had a large brown holland apron covering her cotton gown, and a thick white cap surrounding her frosty-apple cheeks. The room was as neat and bright as her own little active figure. The little greenish window behind was open to admit the scent of the mignonette in the garden, and the pale pink monthly rose which looked in. On the sill of the opened window there was a line of books, and a writing-table stood under it, slightly inappropriate, yet disturbing nothing of the homely harmony of the cottage. The door to the street was open too, and any passing stranger could have seen Janet, who now and then looked out, with a carrot in one hand, and the knife with which she was scraping it in the other, wondering where that lassie J'yce could have gone to. The holidays had begun, and Joyce was free. She had done her share of the household service before she went out; but her tender old guardian was of opinion that about this hour 'a piece' was essential, though that was a thing of which Joyce could never be got to take proper heed. She had turned her back to the world, however, and was emptying her bowlful of vegetables into the pot, when Mrs. Hayward tapped at the open door. Janet said mechanically, 'Come in—come away in,' without hurrying the operation in which she was engaged. When she turned she found another bright-eyed woman looking in at her from the pavement.

'May I come in?' said Mrs. Hayward.

'Certainly, mem, ye may come in, and welcome. Come away,' said Janet, lifting a wooden chair, and placing it, though the day

was very warm, within reach of the fire. It was clean as scrubbing could make it, yet she dusted it mechanically with her apron, as is the cottager's use. Mrs. Hayward watched every movement with her bright eyes, and observed all the details of the little house. A simple woman, looking like a French peasant with her thick cap; a little rustic village house, without the slightest pretension of anything more. And this was the house in which the girl had been bred who Henry said was a lady—a lady! He knew so little, poor fellow, and men are taken in so easily. No doubt she was dressed in cheap finery, like so many of the village girls.

'I wanted, if you will allow me, to make some inquiries about your—but she is not your daughter?'

'About Joyce?' said the old woman quickly. She put down the bowl and came forward a few steps, from henceforward departing from her *rôle* of simple hospitality and friendliness, and becoming at once one of the parties to a duel, watching every step her adversary made. 'And what will ye be wanting with Joyce?' she asked, planting her foot firmly on the floor of her little kingdom. She was queen and mistress there, let the other be what she might.

'It is difficult to say it in a few words,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'I have heard that though you have brought her up like your child, and been so tender to her, yet that she is no relation of yours.'

'There are idle folk in every place,' said Janet sententiously, 'who have nothing to do but to stir up a' the idle tales that ever were heard about the country-side.'

'Do you mean, then, that this is an idle tale?'

The two antagonists watched each other with keen observation, and Janet saw that there was something like pleasure, or at least relief, in her adversary's manner of putting the question. 'It a' depends on the sense it's put in,' she said.

'We can't go on fencing like this all day,' cried Mrs. Hayward quickly. 'I will tell you plainly what I want. My husband has seen the girl whom you call Joyce.'

'Mem, you might keep a more civil tongue in your head,' said Janet, 'and ca' her something else than the girl.'

'What should I call her? I have not seen her. It is not with any will of my own that I am here. I hear her very highly spoken of, and your great kindness to her, and her—what is far more uncommon—gratitude to you.'

'Mem,' said Janet, 'we Scots folk, we're awfu' unregenerate in the way of pride. We are little used to have leddies coming

'inquiring into our maist private concerns, ca'ing a woman's affection for her bairn kindness, and a good lassie's good heart for her faither and mither gratitude.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Mrs. Hayward, rising up suddenly and putting out her hand. 'You are quite right, and I am—unregenerate as you say. The reason is, I have been a little put out this morning, and I have inquiries to make which I don't make with any heart. I have come to ask you to let me see the things which Joyce's mother left behind her—or at least the letters which Mrs. Bellendean told my husband of. A glance at them would possibly settle the question. My husband thinks—that he knows who she is.'

Janet had wiped her hand with her apron, and given it to her visitor, but with some reluctance. 'And wha may your husband be, mem?' she said.

'He says he spoke to you the other day. He is, though I say it, a distinguished soldier. He is Colonel Hayward, who was Captain Bellendean's commanding officer.'

Janet was not greatly moved by Colonel Hayward's distinction, nor by his grade, but that he should be the Captain's commanding officer impressed her at once. 'Then he'll be a gentleman that's far aboon the like of us,' she said, 'and no' a man that would put forth his hand for naught, or disturb a decent poor family without just cause.' She stood a little, fingering her apron, 'glowering frae her,' as she would have said, casting a wistful look into vacancy. 'It will maybe be something—that would make a great change,' she said, her lips quivering a little, 'if it can' true.'

'I am afraid it would make a great change,' said Mrs. Hayward, and she added with a sigh, 'both to you and to me.'

'To you!' Janet clasped her hands. 'What will you have to do with it? What would it be to the like of you? You're no—you're no——? or the Cornel——?' The old woman put her hand with natural eloquence to her breast. 'My heart's just loupin' like to choke me. Oh mem, what would it be to you?'

'Look here,' said her visitor. 'We may be giving ourselves a great deal of unnecessary trouble. It may happen that when I see the letters it will all come to nothing. Then let me see them directly, there's a dear woman. That is the best and the only thing to do.'

There was a sweep of energetic movement about this rapid little lady that pressed forward Janet's reluctant feet. She took a step or two forward towards the stair. But there she paused

again. 'I've aye said to Peter we must keep a loose grip,' she said. 'And when she was only a wean it would have been nothing: but she's come to be that between him and me, that I canna tell how we're ever to part. I've never said it to her. Na. I'm no' one to spoil a young cratur' with praisin' her. I've kept it before her, that if she had mair headpiece than the rest, it was nae credit of hers, but just her Maker that had made her sae. It's no' for that. It's no because she's an honour and a glory to them that have brought her up. Whiles the one that ye are proudest of is just the one that will rend your heart. But she's that sweet—and that bonnie—bonnie in a' her ways—ye canna help but see she's a leddy born; but to take upon hersel' because o' that. Na, na. . That shows ye dinna ken our J'yce. Oh, I aye said haud a loose grip!' cried the old woman, with broken sobs interrupting her speech. 'I've said it to my man a thoosan' times and a thoosan' to that; but it's mair than I have done mysel' at the hinder end.'

The stranger's bright eyes grew dim. She put her hand on Janet's arm. 'I should like to cry too,' she said—'not like you, for love, but for pure contrariness, and spite, and malice, and all that's wicked. Come and show me the letters. Perhaps we are just troubling ourselves in vain, both you and I——'

'Na, na, it's no' in vain,' said Janet, restraining herself with a vehement effort. 'If it may be sae this time, it'll no' be sae anither time. We may just be thankful we have keepit her sae lang. I never looked for it, for my pairt. I'll gang first, mem, though it's no' mainners, to show you the way. This is her cha'amer, my bonnie darling; no' much of a place for a leddy like you to come in to, or for a leddy like her—God bless her!—to sleep in. But we gave her what we had. We could do nae mair—if ye were a queen ye could do nae mair. And she's been as content all her bonnie days as if she was in the king's palace. Oh, but she's been content; singing about the house that it was a pleasure to hear her, and never thinking shame—never, never—of her auld granny, wherever she was. She has ca'ed me aye granny—it was mair natural; and nae slight upon the poor bonny bit thing that is dead and gone.'

Janet went on talking as she placed a chair for the visitor, and went forward to the rude little desk where Joyce kept her treasures. She talked on, finding a relief in it, a necessity for exertion. Mrs. Hayward looked round the little homely place, meanwhile, with a curiosity which was almost painful. It was a tiny little room with a sloping roof, furnished in the simplest way, though a white

counterpane on the little bed, and the white covering of the little dressing-table in the window, gave an air of care and daintiness amid the simple surroundings. A few photographs of pictures were pinned against the wall. But the place of honour was given to two photographic groups framed, one representing a group of school children, the other a band of (Mrs. Hayward thought) very uncouth and clumsy young men. Janet, with a wave of her hand towards these, said—'Hersel' and her lassies,' and 'Andrew and some of his freends.' It seemed to the keen but agitated observer, in the formality of the heavy cluster of faces, as if all were equally commonplace and uninteresting. She sat down and watched, with an impatience which nothing but long practice could have kept within bounds, while Janet opened the desk which stood against the wall, and then a drawer in it, out of which at last, with trembling hands, she brought a little parcel, wrapped in a white handkerchief. Janet was as reluctant as her visitor was eager. She would fain have deferred the test, or put it aside altogether. Why had she kept these papers for her own undoing? She undid the handkerchief slowly. There fell out of it as she unfolded it several small articles, each done up in a little separate packet. 'A' her bit things that she had,' Janet explained. 'A locket round her neck, and a bit little watch that winna go, and the chain to it, and twa rings. I wanted Joyce to wear them, but she will wear nothing o' the kind, no' so much as a bit brooch. Maybe you will ken the rings if you see them,' said Janet, always anxious to postpone the final question, putting down the larger packet, and picking up with shaking fingers, which dropped them two or three times before they were finally secured, the tiny parcel • in which the ornaments were enclosed.

'No, no,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'The letters are the only things. Show me the letters, I implore you, and don't let us torture ourselves with suspense.'

'Ae kind of torture is just as bad as another,' said the old woman, undoing with great unsteadiness the cotton-wool in which the trinkets were enclosed. She held them out in the palm of her brown and work-scarred hand. A little ring of pearl and turquoise, made for a very slender finger, in a simple pattern, like a girl's first ornament, and beside it another, equally small, a ruby set round with brilliants. The glimmer of the stones in the old woman's tremulous hand, the presence of these fragile symbols of a life and history past, gave the spectator a shock of sympathetic pain almost in spite of herself. She put them away with a hurried gesture—'No, no; nothing but the letters. I never saw these

before ; I know nothing—nothing but the letters. Show me the letters.'

Janet looked at the trinkets and then at Mrs. Hayward, with a rising light of hope in her eyes. 'Ye never saw them before? It will just be somebody else and no her ye was thinking of? That's maist likely, that's real likely——' wrapping them up again slowly in their cotton-wool. Her fingers, unused to delicate uses, were more than ever awkward in their tremor. To put them back again was the business of several minutes, during which she went on: 'You will not be heeding to see the other things? I have them here in her box, just as she left them—for Joyce would never hear of puttin' on onything—and they're auld-fashioed, nae doubt, poor things. You'll no be heeding?—oh ay, the letters—I'm forgetting the letters. But, mem, if ye've nae knowledge of her bit rings and things, ye will get nothing out of the letters. There's nae information in them. I've read them mysel' till I could near say them off by heart, but head or tail of them I could mak' nane. Here they are, any way. She's made a kind of a pocket-book to put them in—a' her ain work, and bonnie work it is—flowered with gold ; I never kent where she got the gift o't. Ye would think she could just do onything she turned her hand to. Ay, there they are.'

And with no longer any possible pretence for delay, she thrust a little velvet case into Mrs. Hayward's hand—who between impatience and suspense was as much excited as herself. It was worked in gold thread with a runic cross, twisted with many knots and intertwinings, and executed with all the imperfections of an art as uninstructed as that of the early workers in stone who had wrought Joyce's model. Inside, wrapped carefully in paper, were the two silent witnesses—the records of the tragedy, the evidence which would be conclusive. Mrs. Hayward's hands trembled too as she came to this decisive point—they dropped out of her fingers into her lap. Her heart gave a leap of relief when her eye fell on the handwriting of the uppermost, which was unknown to her. The other was folded, nothing showing but the paper, yellow and worn at the edges with much perusal. In spite of herself, she took this up with a feeling of repugnance and dread—afraid of it, afraid to touch it, afraid to see——what instinct told her must be there. She paused, holding it in her hand, and gave Janet a look. No words passed between them, but for the moment their hearts were one.

Mrs. Hayward opened the folded paper, then gave a low cry, and looked at Janet once more—and to both the women there was

a moment during which the solid earth, and this little prosaic spot on it, seemed to go round and round.

‘It will be what you was looking for!’ said Janet at last. She had been full of lamentation and resistance before. She felt nothing now except the hand of fate. The other shook her head.

‘Yes,’ she replied, and said no more.

CHAPTER VIII

IN the meantime Colonel Hayward was walking up and down the village street, waiting for his wife. He passed and repassed the door two or three times. He was very nervous, hanging about, not knowing what to make of himself. The church stood at the end of the street, and a path led down by the side of the churchyard, in the direction of Bellendean. As he came to the end of this, he stopped in the abstraction of his mind to look down the line of shade which a high hedgerow opposite to the low mossy wall of the churchyard threw half-way across the path. Some one was coming along in this clear and soft shadow, which was so grateful in the midst of the sunshine. It startled him to see it was Joyce, in her dark dress, her face relieved against the broad brim of an untrimmed straw hat, which added in its tone of creamy white additional force to the very delicate tints of her face, so clear in the shadowy air, with an impression of coolness in the midst of great warmth. He cast an anxious look of suspense over his shoulder towards the house where his wife was; but as he did not see her, nor any sign of her coming, he turned down the path to meet Joyce. It was rather by way of diverting his own anxiety than from any eagerness to address her. He seemed to want somebody to whom he could talk to relieve his own mind; for up to this moment, except from curiosity and anxiety in respect to the past, and a certain admiration of herself and her demeanour, it had not been Joyce, upon her own account, who had interested the Colonel. He had not had leisure as yet to get so far as her—for herself. He went on to talk to her because she was in it, concerned like himself, though she might not be aware of the fact, in the matter which his wife at present was engaged in clearing up. It was as if the scene then going on at the cottage was a consultation of doctors upon the life or death of a beloved patient. Those who are waiting breathless for the opinion, which is at the same time a sentence, are glad to get together to ask

each other what they think,—at least, to stand together and wait, feeling the support of company. This was Colonel Hayward's feeling. He went towards the girl with a sense that she had more to do with it than any one else—but not with any perception of its immense importance to her.

Joyce had gone out in the freedom which comes to all the members of the scholastic profession, small and great, with the first morning of the holidays. To have no lessons to give, no claim of one kind or another, nothing but their own occupations, whatever they may be, gives to these happy people a sense of legitimate repose. For one thing, the members of almost every other profession have to go away to secure this much-desired leisure, but to the teacher it comes, without any effort, by appointment of nature, so to speak, by a beneficent arrangement which takes all selfishness out of the enjoyment, since it has been invented, not for the good primarily of himself, but of the flock who are so happily got rid of, to their own perfect satisfaction. The sweet consciousness that the happiness and freedom of so many sufferers have been consulted before one's own, gives sweetness and grace to it. Joyce had risen this morning with that exquisite sense of freedom, and she had gone out with a book as soon as the household work she never neglected was over, to read and muse on a favourite spot, a point in the park at Bellendean out of reach of the house, where behind a great screen of trees the wayfarer came suddenly in sight of the Firth, the circle of low hills which protects the narrower sea at the Queen's Ferry, and the sheltered basin of St. Margaret's Hope. The sight of this wonderful combination of sea and sky and solid soil, the soft hills rising round, the mass of grey stones on the water's edge, which marks a ruined castle, the island in the midst, the widening out beyond into the infinite, into the wider Firth and the stormy waters of the northern sea, affording an ever-open door for the fancy,—were delightful to this imaginative girl. She had taken her book, but she did not open it—for which she upbraided herself, confessing in the secret depths of her soul that Andrew would not have done so,—that he would have read and expounded and discussed and found a new beauty in every line, where she, so much his intellectual inferior, did nothing. She did not even think—if further avowal must be made, she did not even see the lovely landscape for the sake of which she had come here. It entered into her, reflecting itself in her dreamy eyes, and printing itself in her mind; but she did not look as Andrew would have done, finding out beautiful 'lights,' and commanding all the details

of the scene. Joyce was a little short-sighted, and did not see the details. It was to her a large blurred celestial world of beauty and colour, and abundant delicious air and sunshine. Her thoughts went from her, where she sat in the heart of the morning, looking over the Firth, with all its breadth of melting light and reflection, to those low hills of the farther shore.

It had been thus that she had entered upon her holidays in the other days when life had no cares. The dreamings about Lady Joyce, and all the speculations as to her future, had come in other scenes, where there was a want of brightness and of a stronghold of her own to retire into. Here she had not needed that fanciful world of her own. But to-day Joyce was in a different mood. After a while she began to become insensible altogether to the scene, and resumed more personal musings instead. 'Young lady, where did you get your name?' It was not the first time she had been so questioned. Half the people she met asked her the same; but not as Colonel Hayward did. 'I knew some one once'—what did he mean? why did he not come back and tell her? These thoughts became urgent after a while, so that she could not sit and dream, as was her wont in her favourite spot. She got up with a little impatience and vexation and disappointment to return home. But in the lane which led up to the village street, in the clear shadow of the tall hawthorn hedge, behold some one advancing to meet her, at sight of whom her heart began to beat—more loudly than it had ever beaten at the sight of Andrew Halliday; it sprang up thumping and resounding. 'He knows who I am,' she said to herself. 'Perhaps he will tell me; perhaps he is looking for me to tell me. Perhaps he is something to me.' Her veins seemed suddenly to fill with a rushing quick-flowing stream.

Colonel Hayward took off his hat as he came up. This was to him an everyday action, but to her an unusual grace, a homage which only lately had ever been given to her, and which she esteemed disproportionately as a sign of special chivalry. It brought the colour to her cheeks, which ebbed again the moment after in the fluctuations of her anxiety. The old Colonel looked very anxious too; his face was agitated, and paler than usual. When he came up to her he stopped. 'I don't think,' he said, 'that we were ever introduced to each other; but still—— You have been taking a walk this fine morning?'

'The holidays have just begun, sir,' said Joyce respectfully. 'This is the first day: and though I am very fond of my work, freedom is sweet at first.'

‘Only at first?’

‘It is always sweet,’ she said, with a smile; ‘but never so delicious as the first day.’

Their hearts were not in this light talk, and here it came to an end. He had turned with her, and they were walking along side by side. Great anxiety—tremulous and breathless suspense—were in the minds of both on the same subject—and yet they regarded it in aspects so different! The soft transparent shadow of the hedge kept them from all the flicker of light and movement outside, giving a sort of *recueillement*, a calm of gravity and stillness, to the two figures. Had they been in a picture, there could have been no better title for it than ‘The Telling of the Secret.’ But yet there was no secret told. He was absorbed in his own thoughts, and unconscious of the wistful looks which she gave him timidly from time to time. At last he turned upon her, and asked the strangest question, with a tremor and quiver in all his big frame.

‘Do you remember your mother?’ he said.

‘My mother!’ The sudden shock brought a wave of colour over her. ‘Oh, sir,’ said Joyce, ‘how could I remember her? for she died when I was born.’

‘True, true—I had forgotten that,’ he said, with an air of confusion. Then added—‘You must forgive me. My mind was full——’

Of what was his mind full? He fell silent after this, and for some time no more was said. But it gradually came to be impossible to Joyce to keep silence. She turned to him, scarcely seeing him in the rush of blood that went to her head.

‘Did you know my mother?’ she said. ‘Oh, sir, will you tell me? Do you know who she was?’

‘I can’t tell—I can’t tell,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘It may be all a mistake. We must not make too sure.’

‘Then you think——’ she cried, and stopped, and looked at him, searching his face for his meaning—the anxious open face which was held before her like a book—though he did not look at her in return. She put her hand, with a light momentary touch, on his arm. ‘Perhaps you don’t know,’ she said hurriedly, ‘that I have things of hers—things she left—that would settle it—that would show you——’

He made a little gesture of assent, waving his hand. ‘My wife is there: that is what keeps me in this suspense.’

‘Where? Where?’

He pointed vaguely in the direction of Joyce’s home. ‘She has gone—to see everything,’ he said.

For the moment a flash of sudden anger came to the eyes of Joyce. 'They are all mine!' she cried. 'It was to me she ought to have come. I am the one chiefly concerned!' Then the flash quenched itself, and her look grew soft and wistful once more. 'Oh, sir,' she said, 'if it was the Joyce you thought—if it was her you supposed—who was she? To tell me that, even if it should turn out all different, would do no harm.'

'It would do no good either,' he said: then turned round to her, and took her hand between his two large brown hands, which were trembling. 'You are very like her,' he said—'so like her that I am forced to believe. She looked just as you are doing when I saw her last. Some relationship there must be—there must be!' Here he dropped her hand again, as if he had not known that he held it. 'There was wrong done to her—the Joyce I mean. She was made very unhappy; but no wrong was meant on—on my—on—on *his* part. Would you really like to hear the story? But it may turn out to be nothing—to have nothing to do with you.'

'Oh, tell me; it will fill up the time; it will ease the suspense.'

'That is what I feel,' he said; 'and you will keep the secret—that is, there is no secret; it is only what happened to—what happened long, long ago—to—to one of my friends: you understand,' he said tremulously, but with an effort to be very firm, looking at her, 'to—one of my friends.'

Joyce made a sign of assent, too much absorbed in what she was about to hear to think what this warmth of asseveration meant. It was a relief to him to speak. It was like going over all the changes of the illness when a beloved sufferer lies between life and death.

'They met,' he said, 'abroad, at a foreign station. She was very young. She was with people that were not kind to her. They married in a great hurry, without proper precautions, without thinking that anything could be wrong. They came home soon after for her health, and I—I had to—I—I don't quite remember——' his voice seemed to die away in his throat; then with another effort he recovered it and went on—'Her husband had to leave her and go back—to his duty: and then she heard from some wicked person—oh, some wicked person!—God forgive her, for I can't—that it was not a true marriage. It was, it was! I protest to you no thought of harm—good Lord! nothing but love, honest love—and it was all right, all right, as it turned out.'

'But she thought—she had been deceived!' Joyce listened

with her head drooping, keeping down the climbing sorrow in her throat, hardly able to find her voice.

'She was always hasty,' he said. 'I am not the one to blame her—oh no, no—it was not wonderful, perhaps, that she should believe. And letters to India were not then as now—they took so long a time; and something happened to delay the answer. It was what you call nobody's fault—only an accident—an accident that cost——'

'You are very, very kind—oh, you are kind; you speak as if you had felt for her with all your heart—as if she had been your very own.'

He gave her a startled look, and made a momentary pause: then he proceeded, 'That's all,—all that anybody has known. She disappeared. His letter came back to him. He could not get home to search for her. It had to be trusted to others. After years, when I came back, I—I—but nothing could ever be found.'

'Sir,' said Joyce, gasping a little to keep down her sobs, 'I think that must have been my mother. I—think it must be. She begins in her letter to tell him—she calls him Henry—was that his name?'

The old Colonel made a noise in his throat which sounded like a sob too: he nodded his head in assent, as if he could not speak.

'She begins to tell him—is he living still?'

This question had the strangest effect upon Colonel Hayward. He turned round upon her, steadying himself, looking her in the face, with momentary wonder and something like indignation: then the energy died out of him all at once, and he nodded his head again.

'My father! then I have a father,' said Joyce, with a voice as soft and tender as a dove's. She was not now paying any attention to him or his looks, but was entirely absorbed in this new wonderful discovery of her own.

But he started with a sudden cry—'Good God!' as if something new—something too astounding to understand—had flashed upon him. Her father! why, so it was!—so he was—— He had thought of no subject but this for days, and yet this point of view had not opened upon him. They had reached the head of the lane, and were now in the village street, turned towards the cottage in which Joyce had lived all her life, and near enough to see the light little figure of Mrs. Hayward standing at the door. This caught his attention, but not hers. For Joyce had plunged suddenly with a new impulse back into the enchanted country of her dreams. A father—and one who had done no wrong—who

was not to blame—a living father ! It was only when she turned to Colonel Hayward, after the first bound of exhilaration and breathless pleasure, to ask him, clasping her hands unconsciously, ‘Who is my father ?’ that she saw the extraordinary commotion in his face. He was looking at her, and yet his eyes made quick voyages to and from his wife. The lines of his face had all melted into what Joyce felt to be the ‘kindest’ look she had ever met. And yet there was alarm and boundless anxiety in it. He looked as if he did not hear her question, but suddenly laid his hand upon hers, and gave it a strong momentary pressure. ‘I must know first. I must speak to my wife,’ he said incoherently. ‘God bless you !—I must ask Elizabeth. You must wait : I must speak to Elizabeth. But God bless you, my dear !’

He was already gone, hastening with long steps up the street. The thought passed through Joyce’s mind that this must have been a dear friend,—some one, perhaps, who had loved her mother : and a man with the tenderest heart. There was something in his ‘God bless you’ which seemed to fall upon her like the dew—a true blessing ; the blessing of one who had always been her friend, though she had never known him. She did not hurry to follow him to satisfy herself, but went on quietly at her usual pace, looking at the old gentleman’s long swift steps, and thinking of a camel going over the ground. He was from the East, too ; and he devoured the way, hastening to the little figure which had perceived and which was waiting for him. Joyce had the faculty of youth to remark all this, yet keep up her own thoughts at the same time. She saw old Janet standing at the door looking out, with the hem of her apron in her hand, which was her gesture when her mind was much occupied or troubled : and the little lady in the street standing waiting, and then, her own old friend, the Colonel, hurrying up, putting his arm within the lady’s, leading her away with his head bent over her. There was a certain amusement in it all, which floated on the surface of the great excitement and wonder and delight of the discovery she had made. A father ; and a dear old friend, the kindest, the most sympathetic, who blessed her, and who had a right to bless her, having loved (she could not doubt it) her mother before her.

Joyce did not know what the next disclosure might be,—did not think for the moment that, whatever it was, it must change the whole tenor of her life. Nor did she think that there was still a doubt in it,—that it might yet come to nothing, as he had said. Oh no, it could not come to nothing ; everything pieced in to the story. The doubt which Janet had always chilled her, that

a young creature disappearing so utterly, with no one to care for her, no one to inquire after her, must have had a story in which shame was involved—how completely was it dissipated and explained by this real tale! Oh, no shame! she had felt sure there could not be shame—nothing but the cruel distance, the fatal accident that had delayed the letter, those strange elements of uncertainty which mix in every mortal story, which (Joyce remembered from that reading which had hitherto been her life) the ancients called fate. And what could they be called but fate? If it had come in time that letter! as letters which mean nothing, which are of no consequence, come every day—and yet he had said the delay was nobody's fault. Was it less fatal, less fateful than those incidents that lead towards the end of a tragedy in the poets? and this was a tragedy. Oh, how sad, how pitiful, to the Joyce of twenty years ago! but not to our Joyce, who suddenly found this July morning her vague dreams of youth, her fancies that had no foundation, coming true.

'You've been a long time away,' said Janet from the door. She had watched Joyce's approach until they were within a few steps of each other, when she had suddenly withdrawn her eyes, and taking to examining the hem of her apron, which she laid down and pinched between her fingers, as if preparing it to be hemmed over again. The corners of Janet's mouth were drawn down, and a line or two marked in her forehead, as when she was angry and about to scold her nursling. 'I could wuss,' she said, 'that ye wouldna stravaig away in the mornin' without a piece or onything to sustain ye, and maybe getting your death o' cauld, sittin' on the grass.'

'It is the first day of the holidays, granny,' said Joyce. She came in smiling, and put down her book, and going up to her faithful guardian, put an arm round her, and laid her cheek against hers. Caresses are rare in a Scotch peasant's house. Janet half turned away her own wrinkled cheek. The intensity of the love within her rose into a heat which simulated wrath.

'I'm no a wean to be made o'. I like nane o' your phrasin's. I like when folk do as I bid them, and make nae steer.'

'Oh, granny,' said Joyce, 'but my heart is so full, and I have so much to tell you.'

'What can ye have to tell me? I have maybe mair to tell you than ever ye thought upon; and as for a full heart, how can the like of you, with a' your life before ye, ken what that means?'

'Granny, I have had a long talk with that gentleman—the gentleman that thought he knew my mother.'

'And what had he to say to you? I'm thinking your mother has been just killed among them. That's my opinion. A poor young solitary thing, that had naeboddy to stand up for her. And sae will ye be if ye lippen to them,' cried Janet, suddenly sitting down and covering her face with her apron,—'sae will ye be. Ye are weel off now, though maybe ye dinna think sae.'

'Granny, have I ever given you any reason to say that?'

Janet withdrew her apron from her eyes. Her eyes were red with that burden of tears which age cannot shed like youth. The passion of love and grief which overflowed her being could only get vent in this irritation and querulous impatience. Her long upper lip quivered, a hot moisture glistened on the edges of her eyelids. She looked at the young creature, standing half on the defensive before this sudden attack, yet half disposed to meet it with tender laughter and jest. 'Oh, ye can make licht o't,' she cried. 'What is't to you? just the life ye've aye been craving for,—aye craving for,—ye canna say nay. But to me what is it?' said the old woman. 'It's just death. It's waur than death; it's just lingerin', and longin' and frettin' wi' my Maker for what I canna have! When we took ye to our airms, a bit helpless bairn, maybe there was that in our hearts that said the Lord was our debtor to make it up to us. But them that think sae will find themselves sair mista'en; for He has just waited and waited till ye had come to your flower and were our pride! And now the fiat has gaen forth, no' when ye were a little bairn; and I aye said, "Haud a loose grip!" But now that a' the danger seemed overpast, now that—wheesht!' cried Janet suddenly, coming to an abrupt pause. In the silence that followed they heard a slow and heavy foot, making long and measured steps, advancing gradually. They heard that among many others, for it was the time when the labourers were coming home to dinner; but to Janet and Joyce there was no mistaking the one tread among so many. Janet got up hurriedly from the chair. 'Wheesht! no' a word before him; it's time enough when it comes,' she said. Joyce had not waited even for this, but had begun to lay the table, so that Peter when he came in should find everything ready. He came in with his usual air of broadly smiling expectation, and took his bonnet from his grizzled red locks, which was the fashion Joyce had taught him, as he stepped across the threshold. 'It's awful warm the day,' were his first words, as he went in, notwithstanding, and placed himself in the big chair near the fire. The fire was the household centre whether it was cold or warm. 'So you've gotten the play?' he added, beaming upon Joyce, awaiting some-

thing which should make him open his mouth in one of those big brief laughs that brought the water to his eyes. It was not necessary that it should be witty or clever. Joyce was wit and cleverness embodied to her foster-father. When she opened her lips his soul was satisfied.

And before Peter the cloud disappeared like magic. Janet was cheerful, and Joyce like everyday. They listened to his talk about the ripening corn, and where it was full in the ear, and where stubby, and about the Irish shearers that will be down upon us like locusts afore we ken,—‘and a wheen Hieland cattle too,’ said Peter, who was not favourable to the Celts. Then the broth was put on the table and the blessing said, and the humble dinner eaten as it had been for years in the little family which held together by nature, and which, so far as had appeared, nothing could ever divide.

CHAPTER IX .

THE Colonel took his wife's arm, drawing her close to him, leaning over her little figure: he could hold her closer in this way, and take her strength more completely into his own than if she had taken his arm in the ordinary fashion. But she gave him but an uncertain support for the first time in their life. The group made up of those two figures linked into one, making but one shadow, tottered as they set out. And she made no reply to his look, to the urgent clasp of his arm on hers, until they had passed out of the village street, and gained the quiet and stillness of the avenue within the gates. Then Elizabeth—unprecedented action!—detached herself almost with impatience. 'You hurt me, Henry,' she said quickly, with a sharp intolerance in her tone. This brought the painful excitement of the morning to a climax; for when had she complained before?

'My dear!' he cried, with a tone of compunction and horror, 'I—hurt you?' as if he had been accused of high treason and brutal cruelty combined.

This accent of amazed contrition brought Mrs. Hayward to herself. 'Oh no, Henry,' she said, 'you did not hurt me at all. I am not fit to speak to any good Christian. I am a wretched creature, full of envy, and malice, and all uncharitableness. Let me alone a little till I come to myself.'

The Colonel gave her a piteous look. 'As long as you please, my dear,' he said; then added apologetically, 'I can't help feeling very anxious. There is more in this than meets the eye—there is more in it than I realised: there is—the—the young lady, Elizabeth.'

In spite of herself his wife looked at him with a momentary scorn which was almost fierce. 'Do you mean to say that this is the first time you have thought of that?'

The Colonel was very apologetic. 'I am afraid I am dense,'

he said; 'but, my dear, I always like to wait till I know what you think—and as yet you have said nothing. How was I to suppose——' Here he broke off, seeing in his wife's eyes more than he could read all at once, and with a tremulous movement laid his hand again upon her arm. 'What is it?' he said.

She was tremulous too, but in a different fashion. She began to open out a little parcel which she held in her hand quickly, almost with indignation. 'You will know what to think when you see your own hand and name,' she said. 'There! that's been laid up waiting for me—fancy! for *me* to find it—these twenty years.'

The Colonel looked at the yellow old letters with increasing agitation, but no increase of understanding. 'What is it?' he said. 'What does it mean, Elizabeth? I did not go through all this, only to come to an old letter of my own at the last.'

The little woman stamped her foot with a kind of fury. 'I think you are determined not to understand,' she cried. 'Look who that letter is addressed to—look at this other along with it; for God's sake, Henry, don't worry me any more! don't ask what I think: look at them for yourself.'

He did look, but with so bewildered an expression that compassion overcame her. She took the papers over which he was puzzling, looking at his own writing vaguely, with a quick impatient movement.

'You have been right, quite right in your conjectures,' she said; 'the poor girl that came here alone twenty years ago, and had her baby, and went wrong in her head, and died, was your poor young wife, Joyce Hayward, Henry. There is your letter to her—not the kind of letter I should have thought you would have written; and there is hers to you, a voice out of the grave. Don't look at me in that pitiful way. I don't expect you to read it here. Go away to your own room or into the woods, Henry, and read your wife's letter. Go away! go away! and do this for yourself without me. I am not the person,' cried Mrs. Hayward, thrusting them into his hands, and pushing him impatiently from her,—'I am not the person to read your wife's letter. Go away! go away!'

'My wife's letter,' he said, with a momentary look of awe and trouble. Then suddenly he put one arm round her, and, half sobbing, said, 'Twenty years since! it has always been right, all the time, my darling, between you and me.'

'Oh, Henry!—is that all you think of at such a moment?'

He patted her shoulder with his large and unsteady hand, and

held her close. 'If it is not all, it's the first and foremost,' he said; 'you will never again, Elizabeth, never any more——'

'Oh, go away! go away!' she cried, stamping her foot upon the path. There were tears in her eyes, half love and softness, half impatience and fury. She pushed him away from her with all her strength, and turning her back upon him, walked quickly through the trees and across the park in the full sunshine. She was distracted with conflicting sentiments, unwilling to be melted, yet touched to the heart; determined that he should go back by himself into that distant past with which she had nothing to do, yet scarcely able to resist the habit of doing everything for him, of encountering even that for him. She hurried along until she had got within the shade of a belt of wood, and out of sight of the spot where she had left her husband. Here Mrs. Hayward suddenly sat down upon the grass, and hid her face in her hands. Sometimes it became necessary for her, even in the ordinary course of affairs, to escape for a moment now and then from the Colonel's constant demands. But to-day it seemed to her that she must do this or die. The sudden summons, the long journey, the agitating news, the commission so suddenly put into her hands, the discovery she had made, all united had overwhelmed her at last. She cried heartily, as she did everything, with an abundant natural overthrow of feeling which relieved and exhausted her, and a sensation underneath all which she could not define whether it was happiness or pain.

This Joyce, who had been from the beginning the shadow upon her married life, in despite of whose possible claims she had married, and whom she had regarded all through with a mixture of pity and indignation and fear, roused in her, dead, almost as strong feelings as if she had been a living claimant to the name and place which were hers. The very fact that the poor girl's story was so pitiful, and that nothing could take away the interest and compassion roused by the image of a young forsaken creature dying so miserably with no one near who loved her, was to Mrs. Hayward at this moment an additional aggravation, adding a pang to all the rest. And yet there was in it an unspeakable relief; and the fact that this, and not any revival of the romance of his youth, had been her husband's first thought, was exquisite to her, yet with a certain acrid sweetness, not unmingled with pain and the contradictoriness of a highly sensitive, impatient, and intolerant soul, sharply conscious of every complication. For notwithstanding her strong personal share in the matter, it was clear to Elizabeth that he ought to have thought of the other, the poor girl in

her youth and misery, first ; and that the sight of her letter, the words written in her anguish, coming to him as it were from her grave, across the silence of twenty years, ought to have transported the man to whom these words were addressed out of all recollection of the present,—out of everything save that tragedy of which, however innocently, he was the cause. She could not but feel it sweet that it was herself and not the dead Joyce of whom in reality he had thought : yet, in a manner, she resented it, and was wounded by it as a thing against nature which ought not to have been. ‘That is all that a man’s love is worth,’ she said to herself. ‘He cost her her life, and it is me he thinks of, who am well and strong, and in no trouble.’ And yet it went to her heart that he should have so thought.

In this keen complication of feeling, Mrs. Hayward, for the time, could realise nothing else. It was not possible to think of the dead girl and herself but as rivals : and this, too, gave her a pang. How mean, how ungenerous, how miserable it was ! Such a story in a book, much more in real life, would have moved her to warm tears ; but in this, which touched herself so closely, she could feel no true pity. It was her rival ; it was one who had come before her, whose shadow had lain upon her life and darkened it, who even now was bringing trouble into it—trouble of which it was impossible to fathom the full extent. How could there be tenderness where such sharp antagonism was ? And yet, how poor, how small, how petty, how unworthy was the feeling !

In these contrarieties her mind was caught, and thrilled with sharp vexation, shame, scorn of herself, and sense of that profound vanity of human things which makes the present in its pettiness so much greater than the past, and dims and obliterates everything that is over. To think that such a tragedy had been, and that those who were most concerned thought of their poor share in it first, and not of her who was the victim ! That contradiction of all that was most true and just, that infidelity which is in every human thing, the callousness and egotism which ran through the best, jarred her with a discord which was in herself as well as in all the rest. But when she had cried her heart out, Mrs. Hayward, as was natural, exhausted that first poignant sensation, and came to contemplate, apart from all that was past, the present condition of affairs, which was not more consolatory. Indeed, when, putting the tragedy of the poor Joyce who was dead out of her mind, she returned to the present, the figure of the living Joyce suddenly rose before her with a sharp distinctness that

made her spring to her feet as a soldier springs to his weapon when suddenly confronted by an enemy. Mrs. Hayward had never seen Joyce, so that this figure was purely imaginary which rose before her, with a stinging touch, reminding her that here was something which was not past but present, a reality,—no affair of memory or sentiment, but a difficulty real and tangible, standing straight before her, not to be passed by or forgotten. She sprang up as if to arms, to meet the new antagonist who thus presented herself, and must be met, but not with arms in hand, nor as an antagonist at all. Joyce herself would scarcely have been so terrible to encounter as Joyce's child thus coming between her husband and herself, taking possession of the foreground of their existence whether they would or not. What Mrs. Hayward would be called upon to do would be—not to retire before this new actor in her existence, not to withdraw and leave the field as she had always felt it possible she might have to do, but to receive, to live with,—good heavens! perhaps to love her! Yes! no doubt this was what the Colonel would want; he would require her to love this girl who was his child. He would take it for granted that she must do so; he would innocently lay all the burden upon her, and force her into a maternity which nature had not required of her. A mother! ah yes, she could have been a mother indeed had God willed it so; but to produce that undeveloped side of her, that capacity which she had been so often tempted to think Providence had wronged her by leaving in abeyance, for the benefit of this country girl, this Scotch peasant, with all her crude education, her conceit (no doubt) of superiority, her odious schoolmistress's training!

Mrs. Hayward could not sit still and look calmly at what was before her. There was something intolerable in it, which stung her into energy, which made her feel the necessity of being up and doing, of making a stand against misfortune. However much she might resent and resist in her private soul, she would have to do this thing, and put on a semblance of doing it with, not against, her own will and liking. Talk of the contradictions of fate! they seemed to be all grouped together in this problem which she had to work out. If the child had been a boy, the Colonel would have been compelled more or less to take the charge upon himself. There would have been school or college, or the necessities of a profession, to occupy the newcomer; but that it should be a girl—a girl! a young woman, a creature entirely within the sphere of Colonel Hayward's wife, whose business it would be not only to be a mother to her, but to receive her as a companion, to amend

her manners, to watch over all her proceedings, to take the responsibility night and day !

Mrs. Hayward felt that she could have put up with a boy. He would not have been her business so much as his father's, and he would not for ever and ever have recalled his mother, and put her in mind of all that had been, and of all she herself had already borne. For though she had accepted the position knowing all that was involved, and though it was, so to speak, her own fault that she had encountered these difficulties, still there could be no doubt that she had for years had much to bear ; and now what a climax, what a crown to everything ! A second Joyce, no doubt, with all the headstrong qualities which had made the first Joyce spoil her own life and the lives of others, with all the disadvantages of her peasant training, of her education even, which would be rather worse than ignorance. Mrs. Hayward conjured up before her the image of a pupil-teacher, a good girl striving for examinations, immaculate in spelling, thinking of everything as the subject of a lesson : looking up with awe to the inspector, with reverence to some little prig of a schoolmaster, a girl with neat collars and cuffs, knowing her own condition in life, and very respectful to her superiors : or else bumptious, and standing upon her dignity as an educated person, which Mrs. Hayward had heard was more the way of the Scotch. In either point of view, what a prospect, what a companion !

And the Colonel's wife knew how that good man would conduct himself. He would remonstrate with her if the girl were *gauche*, or if she were disagreeable and presuming. He would say, 'You must tell her'—'you must make her do so-and-so.' If his taste was shocked, if the girl turned out to be very dreadful, he himself, who ought to know so much better, would throw all the blame upon her. Or perhaps, which would be still more intolerable, his eyes would be blinded, and he would see nothing that was not beautiful and amiable in his child. With a sudden flush of irritation, Mrs. Hayward felt that this would be more unbearable still. Joyce had been the bugbear of his life in the past ; what if Joyce were to be the model, the example of every good quality, the admiration and delight of his life to come : and she herself, the step-mother, the half-rival, half-tyrant, the one who would not appreciate the new heroine ! No one was so ready as Elizabeth to perceive all her husband's excellent qualities. He was good as an angel or a child—there was no soil in him. His kindness, his tenderness, his generous heart, his innocent life, were her pride and delight. And the perpetual appeal which he made

to her, the helplessness with which he flung himself upon her for inspiration and counsel, made him dearer still. She herself laughed and sometimes frowned at the devout aspiration, 'If only Elizabeth were here!' for which all his friends smiled at the Colonel; but at the same time it warmed her heart. And yet there was no one in the world so feelingly alive to the irritations and vexations which were involved in this supreme helplessness and trust. There were moments when he worried her almost beyond endurance. She had to be perpetually on the watch. She had to subdue herself and forget herself, and make a thousand daily sacrifices to the man whom she ruled absolutely, and who was ready at her fiat almost to live or die. But of all intolerable things, that which was most intolerable was the suggestion that he might in this matter judge for himself without her aid,—that he might admit this strange girl into his heart, and place her on the pinnacle which had hitherto been sacred to Elizabeth alone.

She had seated herself on a grassy bank under the shade of the trees which skirted one side of the park of Bellendean. Instinctively she had chosen a spot where there was 'a view.' How many such spots are there to which preoccupied people, with something to think out, resort half unawares, and all-unconscious of the landscape spread before them! Edinburgh, gray in the distance, with her crags and towers, shone through the opening carefully cut in the trees, the angle of the castled rock standing forth boldly against the dimness of the smoke behind; and the air was so clear, and the atmosphere so still, that while Mrs. Hayward sat there the sound of the gun which regulates the time for all Edinburgh—the gun fired from the Castle at one o'clock—boomed through the distance with a sudden shock which made her start. She was not a fanciful woman, nor given to metaphors. But there was something in the peace of the landscape, the summer quiet, broken only by the hum of insects and rustle of the waving boughs, the distant town too far off to add a note to that soft breathing of nature, which made a centre to the picture and no more—when the air was suddenly rent by the harsh and fatal sound of the gun, making the spectator start—which was to her like an emblematic representation of what had happened to herself. To be sure, if she had but thought of it, that voice of war had been tamed into a service of domestic peace, a sound as innocent as chanticleer; but Mrs. Hayward was a stranger, and was unaware of this. As she rose up hurriedly, startled by the shock in the air, she saw her husband coming towards her across the sunshine. He was moving like a man in a dream, moving instinctively

towards where she was, but otherwise unconscious where he was going, unaware of the little heights and hollows, stumbling over the stump of a tree that came in his way. The sight of his abstraction brought her back to herself. He came up to her, and held out the little packet in his hand.

'Put them away,' he said hoarsely; 'lock them up in some sure place, Elizabeth. To think all that should have been going on, and I ignorant—oh, as ignorant as the babe unborn!'

'How could you know when she never told you?' Mrs. Hayward cried quickly, instinctively taking his part, even against himself. He put his large hand upon her small shoulder, and patted her with a deprecating, soothing touch, as if the wrong and the sorrow were not his but hers.

'But she meant us to know—that letter, if I had ever got it! She was young and foolish, young and foolish. Put it away, my dear; don't destroy it, but lock it away safe, and let us think of it no more.'

'That is impossible, Henry. You must think of it, in justice to her—poor thing;' this Mrs. Hayward said unwillingly, from a sense of what was right and fitting, and with a compunction in her heart,—'and for the sake,' she added firmly, after a moment, 'of your child.'

'The girl,' he said vaguely. Then he came closer to her, and put his arm within hers. 'You will see to all that, Elizabeth. You understand these sort of things better than I do. It would be very awkward for me, you know, a man.' To describe the persuasive tone, the ingratiating gesture with which, in his simplicity, he put this burden upon her, would be impossible. Even she, well as she knew him, was struck with surprise—a surprise which was half happiness and half indignation.

'Henry!' she cried, resisting the appealing touch, 'have you no heart for your own child?'

He leant upon her for a moment, drawing as it seemed her whole little person, and all her energy and strength, into himself. 'I'm all upset, Elizabeth. I don't know what I have, whether heart or anything else—except you, my dear, except you. Everything will go right as long as I have you.'

CHAPTER X

IN the perplexity of this extraordinary crisis they both^o went, without another word, 'home': though it was no more home than these wonderful new circumstances were the course of everyday. If we were to prophesy the conduct of human creatures in moments of great emotion by what would seem probable, or even natural, how far from the fact we should be! Colonel Hayward, a man of the tenderest heart and warmest affections, suddenly discovers that he has a child—a child by whose appearance, and everything about her, he has been pleased and attracted, the child of his first love, his young wife to whose cruel death he has contributed, though unwittingly, unintentionally, meaning no evil. Would not all ordinary means of conveyance be too slow, all obstacles as nothing in his way, the very movement of the world arrested till he had taken this abandoned child into his arms, and assured her of his penitence, his joy, his love? But nothing could be further from his actual action. He went back to Bellendean with a feeling that he would perhaps know better what to do were he within the four walls of a room where he could shut himself and be alone. It would be easier to think there than in the park, where everything was in perpetual motion, leaves rustling, branches waving, birds singing,—the whole world astir. 'If we were only in our own room,' he said to his wife, 'we could think—what it was best to do.'

She said nothing, but she longed also for the quiet and shelter of that room. She recognised, as indeed she might have done from the first, that whatever had to be done, it was she that must do it. And Mrs. Hayward was entirely *dépaysée*, and did not know how to manage this business. Janet Matheson was a new species to a woman who had done a great deal of parish work, and was not unacquainted with the ordinary ways of managing 'the poor.' She did not understand how to deal with that proud old

woman, to-whom she could not offer any recompense, whom she would scarcely dare even to thank for her 'kindness.' Janet had repudiated that injurious word, and Mrs. Hayward felt that it would be easier to offer money to Mrs. Bellendean than to this extraordinary cottager. To be sure, that was nothing—a trifle not worth consideration in face of the other question, of Joyce herself, who would have to be adopted, removed from the cottage, taken home as Miss Hayward, a new, and perhaps soon the most important, member of the family. Elizabeth's heart beat as it had never done before, scarcely even when she married Captain Hayward, accepting all the risks, taking him and his incoherent story at a terrible venture. That was an undertaking grave enough, but this was more terrible still. She felt, too, that she would be thankful to get into the quiet of her own room to think it over, to decide what she should best do.

This, however, was more easily said than done. The anxious pair were met in the hall by Mrs. Bellendean with looks as anxious as their own. She was breathless with interest, expectation, and excitement: and came up to them in a fever of eagerness, which, to Mrs. Hayward at least, seemed quite unnecessary, holding out a hand to each. 'Well?' she cried, as if their secrets were hers, and her interest as legitimate as their own. In short, the pair, who were very grave and preoccupied, having exhausted the first passion of the discovery, had much less appearance of excitement and expectation than this lady, who had nothing whatever to do with it. A shade of disappointment crossed her face when she saw their grave looks; but Mrs. Bellendean's perceptions were lively, and she perceived at the same moment tokens of agitation in the old colonel's face which reassured her. It would have been to much if, after all her highly-raised expectations, nothing had happened at all.

'Come into my room,' she said quickly; 'we have half an hour before luncheon, and there we shall be quite undisturbed.' She led the way with a rapidity that made it impossible even to protest, and opening the door, swept them in before her, and drew an easy-chair forward for Mrs. Hayward. 'Now,' she said, 'tell me! You have found out something, I can see.'

They looked at each other,—Mrs. Hayward with the liveliest inclination to tell the lady, whom she scarcely knew, that their affairs were their own. It would have been a little relief to her feelings could she have done so; but this was just the moment, as she knew very well, in which the Colonel was sure to come to the front.

'Yes,' he said, with a sigh, in which there was distinct relief. (He found it so easy to relieve himself in that way!) 'We have found out—all we wanted, more than we expected. Apart from all other circumstances, this is a memorable visit to me, Mrs. Bellendean. We have found—or rather Elizabeth has found—— She is always my resource in everything——'

'What?' cried Mrs. Bellendean, clasping her hands. 'Please excuse me—I am so anxious. Something about Joyce?'

'You must understand that I had no notion of it, no idea of it all the time. I was as ignorant—— There may have been things in which I was to blame—though never with any meaning: but of this I had no idea—none: she never gave me the slightest hint—never the least,' said the Colonel earnestly. 'How could I imagine for a moment—when she never said a word?'

Mrs. Bellendean looked at Mrs. Hayward with an appeal for help, but she gave a smile and glance of sympathy to the Colonel, who seemed to want them most. His wife sat very straight, with her shoulders square, and her feet just visible beneath her gown—very firm little feet, set down steadily, one of them beating a faint tattoo of impatience on the carpet. She was all resistance, intending, it was apparent, to reveal as little as possible; but the Colonel, though his style was involved, was most willing to explain.

'It is,' he said, 'my dear lady, I assure you, as much a wonder and revelation to me as to any one. I never thought of such a possibility—never. Elizabeth knows that nothing was further from my mind.'

'Henry,' said his wife suddenly, 'you have been very much agitated this morning. All these old stories coming up again have given you a shake. Go up, my dear, to your room, and I will tell Mrs. Bellendean all that she cares to hear.'

'Eh? do you think so, Elizabeth? I have got a shake. It agitates a man very much to be carried back twenty years. Perhaps you are right: you can explain everything—much better than I can—much better always; and if Mrs. Bellendean thinks I am to blame, she need not be embarrassed about it, as she might be before me. I think you are right, as you always are. And perhaps she will give you some good advice, my love, as to what we ought to do.'

'I am sure I shall not think you to blame, Colonel Hayward,' cried Mrs. Bellendean, with that impulse of general amiability which completed the exasperation with which Elizabeth sat looking on.

'Yes, no doubt, she will give me good advice,' she said, with irrepressible irritation; 'oh, no doubt, no doubt!—most people do. Henry, take mine for the moment, and go upstairs and rest a little. Remember you have to meet all the gentlemen at luncheon: and after that there will be a great deal to do.'

'I think I will, my dear,' Colonel Hayward said: but he paused again at the door with renewed apologies and doubts—'if Mrs. Bellendean will not think it rude, and even cowardly, of me, Elizabeth, to leave all the explanations to you.'

Finally, when Mrs. Bellendean had assured him that she would not do so, he withdrew slowly, not half sure that, after all, he ought not to return and take the task of the explanation into his own hands. There was not a word said between the ladies until the sound of his steps, a little hesitating at first, as if he had half a mind to come back, had grown firmer, and at last died away. Then Mrs. Hayward for the first time looked at the mistress of the house, who, half amused, half annoyed, and full of anxiety and expectation, had been looking at her, as keenly as politeness permitted, from every point of view.

'My husband has been very much agitated—you will not wonder when I tell you all; and he is never very good at telling his own story. A man who can do—what he can do—may be excused if he is a little deficient in words.'

She spoke quickly, almost sharply, with a little air of defiance, yet with moisture in her eyes.

'Surely,' said Mrs. Bellendean, 'we know what Colonel Hayward is; but pardon me, it was a much less matter—it was about Joyce I wanted to know.'

'The one story cannot be told without the other. My husband,' said Mrs. Hayward, with a long breath, 'had been married before—before he married me. He had married very hurriedly a young lady who came out to some distant relations in India. They were at a small station out of the way. She was not happy, and he married her in a great hurry. Afterwards, when she was in England by herself, having come home for her health, some wicked person put it into the poor thing's head that her marriage was not a good one. She was fool enough to believe it, though she knew Henry. Forgive me if I speak a little hastily. She ought to have known better, knowing him; but some people never know you, though you live by their side a hundred years.'

She stopped to exhale another long breath of excitement and agitation. It was cruel to impute blame to the poor dead girl, and she felt this, but could not refrain.

'And suddenly, after one letter full of complaint and reproach, she wrote no more. He was in active service, and could not get home. It was not so easy then to come home on leave. He wrote again and again, and when he got no answer, employed people to find her out. I can't tell you all the things that were done—everything, so far as he knew how to do it. I didn't know him then. I daresay he wasted a great deal of money without getting hold of the right people. He never heard anything more of her, never a word, till the other day.'

'Then that poor young creature was—— And Joyce—Joyce!—who is Joyce? Mrs. Hayward, do you mean really that Joyce——'

'Joyce—was his first wife: and this girl—who has the same name,—I have not seen her, I don't know her, I can express no feeling about her,—this young lady is my husband's daughter, Mrs. Bellendean.'

'Colonel Hayward's daughter!' Mrs. Bellendean sprang to her feet in her surprise and excitement. She threw up her hands in wonder and delight and sympathy, her eyes glittered and shone, a flush of feeling came over her. Any spectator who had seen the two ladies at this moment would have concluded naturally that it was Mrs. Bellendean who was the person chiefly concerned, while the little woman seated opposite to her was a somewhat cynical looker-on, to whom it was apparent that the warmth of feeling thus displayed was not quite genuine. The Colonel's wife was moved by no enthusiasm. She sat rigid, motionless, except for that one foot, which continued to beat upon the carpet a little impatient measure of its own.

'Oh,' cried Mrs. Bellendean, 'I always knew it! One may deceive one's self about many people, but there was no possibility with Joyce. She was—she is—I never saw any one like her—quite, quite unprecedented in such a place as this: like nobody about her—a girl whom any one might be proud of—a girl who—oh yes, yes! you are right in calling her a young lady. She could be nothing less. I always knew it was so.'

'She is my husband's daughter,' said Mrs. Hayward, without moving a muscle. She remained unaffected by her companion's enthusiasm. She recognised it as part of the burden laid upon her that she should have to receive the outflowings of a rapture in which she had no share.

'And what did Joyce say?' asked the lady of Bellendean. 'And poor old Janet! oh, it will not be good news to her. But what did Joyce say? I should like to have been there; and why, why

did you not bring her up to the house with you? But I see,—oh yes, it was better, it was kinder to leave her a little with the old people. The poor old people, God help them! Oh, Mrs. Hayward, there is no unmixed good in this world. It will kill old Janet and her old husband. There's no unmixed good.'

'No,' said Mrs. Hayward quietly. She sat like a little figure of stone, nothing moving in her, not a finger, not an eyelash,—nothing but the foot, still beating now and then a sort of broken measure upon the floor.

Mrs. Bellendean sat down again when she had exhausted her first excitement. There is nothing that chills one's warmest feelings like the presence of a spectator who does not share one's satisfaction. Mrs. Hayward would have been that proverbial wet blanket, if there had not been in the very stiffness of her spectatorship signs of another and still more potent excitement of her own. Strong self-repression at the end comes to affect us more than any demonstration. Mrs. Bellendean was very quick, and perhaps felt it sooner than a less vivid intelligence might have done. She sat down, almost apologetically, and looked at her guest.

'I am afraid,' she said, faltering, 'you are not so glad as I am. I hope it is not anything in Joyce. I hope—she has not displeased you. If she has, I am sure, oh, I am very sure she did not mean it. It must have been—some mistake.'

'Mrs. Bellendean,' cried Elizabeth suddenly, 'I am sure you are very kind. You would not have invited me here as you have done, without knowing anything of me, if you had not been kind. But perhaps you don't quite put yourself in my place. I did not mean to say anything on that subject, but my heart is full, and I can't help it. I married Colonel Hayward—he was only Captain Hayward then—knowing everything, and that it was possible, though not likely, that this wife of his might still be alive. It was a great venture to make. I have kept myself in the background always, not knowing—whether I had any real right to call myself Mrs. Hayward. Joyce has not been a name of good omen to me.'

'Dear Mrs. Hayward!' cried the impulsive woman before her, leaning over the table, holding out both her hands.

'No, don't praise me. I believe I ought to have been blamed instead; but, anyhow, I took the risk. And I have never repented it, though I did not know all that would be involved. And now, when we are growing old, and calm should succeed to all the storms, here is her daughter—with her name—not a child whom I could influence, who might get to be fond of me, but a woman,

grown up, educated in her way, clever:—all that makes it so much the worse. No! don't be sorry for me; I am a wicked woman, I ought not to feel so. Here I find her again, not a recollection, not an idea, but a grown-up girl, the same age as her mother. Joyce over again, always Joyce!

Mrs. Bellendean did not know how to reply. She sat and gazed at the woman whom she wanted to console, who touched her, revolted her, horrified her all in one, and yet whose real emotion and pain she felt to the bottom of her sympathetic heart. Too much sympathy is perhaps as bad as too little. She was all excitement and delight for Joyce, and yet this other woman's trouble was too genuine not to move her. It was very natural too, and yet dreadful,—a pain to think of. 'I am sure,' she said, faltering, 'that when you know her better—when you begin to see what she is in herself: there is no one who does not like Joyce.'

Mrs. Hayward had got rid, in this interval, of a handful, so to speak, of hot sudden tears. She was ashamed of them, angry with herself for being thus overcome, and therefore could not be said to weep, or make any other affecting demonstration, but simply hurried off, threw from her angrily, these signs of a pang which she despised, which hurt her pride and her sense of what was seemly as much as it wrung her heart. She shook her head with a sudden angry laugh in the midst of her emotion. 'Don't you see! that is the worst of all,' she cried.

But at this moment, in the midst of this climax of pain, exasperation, self-disapproval, there arose in soft billows of sound, rising one after the other into all the corners of the great house, the sound of the gong. It reached all the members of the household, along the long corridors and round the gallery, roused Colonel Hayward from the softened and satisfied pause of feeling which his withdrawal upstairs had brought him, and called Mrs. Bellendean back from the wonderful problem of mingled sentiments in which she was embroiling herself, taking both sides at once, into the more natural feelings of the mistress of the house, whose presence is indispensable elsewhere. But she could not break off all at once this interview, which was so very different from the ordinary talks between strangers. She hesitated even to rise up, conscious of the ludicrous anti-climax of this call to food addressed to people whose hearts were full of the most painful complications of life. At the same time, the sound of her guests trooping downstairs, and coming in from the grounds, with a murmur of voices, and footsteps in the hall, became every moment more and more

clamant. She rose at last, and put her hand on Mrs. Hayward's shoulder. 'The gentlemen speak,' she said, 'of things that are solved walking. It will be so with you, dear Mrs. Hayward. It will clear up as you go on. Everything will become easier in the doing. Come now to luncheon.'

'I—to luncheon!—it would choke me,' cried Elizabeth, feeling in her impatience, and the universal contrariety of everything, as if this had been the last aggravation of all.

'No,' said Mrs. Bellendean, putting her arm through that of her guest; 'it will do you good, on the contrary: and the Colonel will eat nothing if you are not there. You shall come in your bonnet 'as you are; and Colonel Hayward will make a good luncheon.'

'I believe he is capable of it,' Mrs. Hayward cried.

CHAPTER XI

THE party was diminished, but still it was a large party. The dining-room at Bellendean was a long room lighted by a line of windows at one side in deep recesses, for the house was of antique depth and strength. The walls were hung with family portraits, a succession of large and imposing individuals, whose presence in uniform or in robes of law, contemplating seriously the doings of their successors, added dignity to the house, but did not do much to brighten or beautify the interior, save in the case of a few smaller portraits, which were from the delightful hand of Raeburn, and made a sunshine in a shady place. The long table, with its daylight whiteness and brightness, concentrated the light, however, and made the ornaments of the walls of less importance; and the cheerful crowd was too much occupied with its own affairs to notice the nervousness of the newcomer, the Colonel's wife, who had only made a brief appearance at breakfast to some of them, and attracted as little warmth of interest as a woman of her age generally does. She sat near Mr. Bellendean at the foot of the table, but as he was one of the men to whom it is necessary to a woman to be young and pretty, Mrs. Hayward had full opportunity to compose and calm herself with little interference from her host. She was separated almost by the length of the table from her husband, and consequently was safe from his anxious observation; and in the bustle of the mid-day meal, and the murmur of talk around her, Mrs. Hayward found a sort of retirement for herself, and composed her mind. Her self-arguments ended in the ordinary fatalism with which people accept the inevitable. 'If it must be, it must be,' she said to herself. Perhaps it might not turn out so badly as she feared; that vision of the pupil-teacher, the perfectly well-behaved, well-instructed girl, who would make her life a burden, and destroy all the privacy and all the enjoyment of her home, was a terrible image: but the sight of so many cheerful faces gradually drove it away.

'Who was I, Uncle Bellendean? I was a Saxon court lady. I was in attendance upon Queen Margaret. But she was not queen then; she was only princess, and an exile, don't you know? We had all been nearly drowned, driven up from the Firth by the wind in the east.'

'And where were you exiled from? and what were you doing in the Firth?' said Mr. Bellendean, who was not perhaps thinking much of what he said.

'Well I am sure,' said Greta, with her soft Scotch intonation, 'I don't very well know; but Joyce does. She will tell you all about it if you ask her.'

'This Joyce is a very alarming person. I hear her name wherever I turn. She seems the universal authority. I thought she must be an old governess; but I hear she's a very pretty girl,' said young Essex, who was at Greta's side.

'Far the prettiest girl in the parish, or for miles round.'

'Speak for yourself, Greta,' said a good-natured, blunt-featured young woman beside her, with a laugh. 'I have always set up myself as a professional beauty, and I don't give in to Joyce—except in so far, of course, as concerns Shakespeare and the musical glasses, where she is beyond all rivalry.'

Sir Harry, who was as little open to the pleasantry of Mid-Lothian as the Scotch in general are supposed to be to English wit, stared a little at the young person who assumed this position. He thought it possible she might be 'chaffing,' but was by no means sure. And he had no doubt that she was plain. He was too polite, however, to show his perplexity. 'Does she receive any male pupils?' he asked. 'My tastes are quite undeveloped: even Shakespeare I don't know so well as I ought. One has to get up a play or two now and then for an exam.: and there's "Hamlet," etc., at the Lyceum of course.'

'Joyce would never forgive you that "Hamlet," etc.,' said the plain young lady. 'You need never hope after that to be pupil of hers.'

'Why, what should I say? Irving has done a lot of them. Shylock and—and Romeo, don't you know? You don't expect me to have all the names ready. A middle-aged fellow had no business to try Romeo. Come, I know as much as that.'

'They are all real people to Joyce,' said Greta. 'She is not like us, who only take up a book now and then. She lives among books: she thinks as much of Shakespeare as of Scotland. He is not only a poet, he is a—he is a—well, a kind of world,' she said, blushing a little. 'I don't know what other word to use.'

'You could not have used a better word,' said Norman Bellendean. 'I am not a very great reader, but I've found that up at a hill-station where one had neither books nor society. I think that was very well said.'

Norman looked with a friendly admiration at his little cousin, and she, with a half glance and blush of reply, looked at Mrs. Bellendean at the head of the table, who, on her side, looked at them both. There was a great deal more in this mutual communication than met the eye.

'Decidedly,' said Sir Harry; 'no one is good enough for this society unless he has undergone a preliminary training at the hands of Miss Joyce.'

'Don't you think,' said a new voice hurriedly, with a ring of impatience in it, 'that to bandy about a young lady's name like this is not—not—quite good taste? Probably she would dislike being talked about—and certainly her friends—'

The young people turned in consternation to the quarter from which this utterance came. The Colonel's wife had not hitherto attracted much attention. It had been settled that he was 'an old darling:' but Mrs. Hayward had not awakened the interest of these judges. They had decided that she was not good enough for him—that she had been the governess perhaps, or somebody who had nursed him through illness, or otherwise been kind to him—and that it was by some of these unauthorised methods that she had become Colonel Hayward's wife. Greta blushed crimson at this rebuke.

'Oh,' she said, 'no one meant anything that was not kind. I would not allow a word to be said. I—am very fond of her. She is my dear friend.'

'Perhaps it is not very good taste to discuss any one,' said the plain young lady. 'But Mrs. Hayward probably does not know who she is.'

'I know that she is your inferior,' said Mrs. Hayward quickly; 'but that should make you more particular, not less, to keep her name from being bandied about.'

'What is that my wife is saying?' said Colonel Hayward from the other end of the table. 'I can hear her voice. What are you saying, Elizabeth? She must be taking somebody's part.'

'It is nothing, Henry, nothing; I am taking nobody's part,' said Mrs. Hayward, becoming the colour of a peony. He had leaned forward to see her, for she sat on the same side of the table; and she leaned forward to reply to him, meeting the looks of half the table, amused at this conjugal demand and response.

And then she shrank back, obliterating herself as well as she could, half angry, half ashamed, with a look of high temper and nervous annoyance which the young people set down to her disadvantage, whispering between themselves, 'Poor Colonel Hayward !' and what a pity it was he had not a nicer wife !

After this another wave of conversation passed over the company. A new subject, or rather half a dozen new subjects, drew the attention and interest of the young people away from this, of which the new and crowning interest was still unknown ; and it was not till some time after, in the course of a lively debate upon the universally attractive theme of private theatricals, that the name which had caused that little controversy and stir of discussion was mentioned again.

Naturally, as it had been already subject to comment, there was at that moment a sudden pause all round the table, and the word came forth with all the more effect, softly spoken with a pause before and after—'Joyce.'

'Upon my word,' said Mr. Bellendean impatiently, 'I agree with Mrs. Hayward. The girl is not here, and she has done nothing to expose herself to perpetual comment. We hear a great deal too much of Joyce.'

And now it was that there occurred the extraordinary incident, remembered for years after, not only in Bellendean but elsewhere, which many people even unconnected with that part of the country must have heard of. There rose up suddenly by the side of Mrs. Bellendean, at the other end of the table, a tall figure, which stood swaying forward a little, hands resting on the table, looking down upon the astonished faces on either side. At sight of it Mrs. Hayward pushed back her chair impatiently, and bent her flushed face over her plate ; while every one else looked up in expectation, some amused, all astonished, awaiting some little exhibition on the part of the guileless old soldier. Norman Bellendean turned his face towards his old Colonel with a smile, but yet a little regret. The *vieux moustache*, out of pure goodness of heart and simplicity of mind, was sometimes a little absurd. Probably he was going once again to propose his young friend's health, to give testimony in his favour as a capital fellow. Norman held himself ready to spring up and cover the veteran's retreat, or to take upon himself the inevitable laugh. But he was no more prepared than the rest for what was coming. Colonel Hayward stood for a moment, his outline clear against the window behind him, his face indistinct against that light. He looked down the table, addressing himself to the host at the end, who half rose to listen, with a face of severe

politeness, concealing much annoyance and despite. 'The old fool,' Mr. Bellendean was saying to himself.

'I want to say,' said the Colonel, swaying forward, as if he rested on those two hands with which he leant on the table, rather than on his feet, 'that a very great event has happened to me here. I came as a stranger, with no thought but to pass a few days, little thinking that I was to find what would affect all my future life. I owe it to the kindness of your house, Mr. Bellendean, and all I see about me, to tell you what has happened. Her name is on all your lips,' he said, looking round him with the natural eloquence of an emotion which, now that the spectators were used to this strange occurrence, could be seen in the quiver of his lips and the moisture in his eyes. 'It is a name that has long been full of sweetness but also of pain to me. Now I hope it will be sweetness only. Joyce—my kind friends, that have been so good to her when I knew nothing—nothing! How can I thank you and this kind lady—this dear lady here! Joyce—belongs to me. Joyce—is Joyce Hayward. She is my daughter. She is my—my only child.'

Close upon this word sounded one subdued but most audible sob from the other end of the table. It was from Mrs. Hayward, who could contain herself no longer. That, at least, might have been spared her—that the girl was his only child. She pushed back her chair and rose up, making a hurried movement towards the door; but fortunately Mrs. Bellendean had divined and frustrated her, and in the universal stir of chairs and hum of wondering voices, Mrs. Hayward's action passed unnoticed, or almost unnoticed. And she escaped while the others all gathered round the Colonel, all speaking together, congratulating, wondering. These were moments when he was very able to act for himself, and did not think at all what Elizabeth would say.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER Peter had got his dinner and had gone out again to his work, a silence fell upon the two who were left behind in the cottage. They had breathed no word, nor even exchanged a glance that could have awakened his suspicions—which was easy enough, for he had no suspicions. And they had avoided each other's eyes: they had talked of nothing that contained any reference to the subject of which their hearts were full. And when they were left alone, they still said nothing to each other. Janet would have no help from Joyce in the 'redding up.' 'Na, na,' she said; 'go away to your reading, or sew at some of your bonnie dies. This is nae wark for you.'

'Granny, I am going to help you as I have always done.'

'This is nae wark for you, and I'll no' let you touch it,' said the old woman, with a sudden stamp of her foot on the ground. 'I'll no' let you touch it! do ye hear me, Joyce? As long as you are here, you sall just do what I say.'

The girl retreated, almost overawed by the passion in the old woman's eyes; and then there was silence in the cottage, broken only by the sound of Janet's movements, as she cleared away everything, and moved about with her quick short step from one place to another. Joyce sat down beside the writing-table, which was her own especial domain, and the quietness of impassioned suspense fell upon the little house. The scent of the mignonette still came in through the window from the little garden behind; but the door was shut, that no cheerful interruption, no passing neighbour with friendly salutations, pausing for a minute's gossip, might disturb the breathless silence. They both expected—but knew not what: whether some fairy chariot to carry Joyce away, some long-lost relatives hurrying to take her to their arms, or some one merely coming to reveal to them who she was,—to tell her that she belonged to some great house, and was the child of some

injured princess. Strangely enough, neither of them suspected the real state of affairs. Janet divined that Mrs. Hayward had something to do with it, but Joyce had not even seen Mrs. Hayward; and the Colonel was to her an old friend who had known and probably loved her mother—but no more.

Thus they waited, not saying a word, devoured by a silent excitement, listening for some one coming, imagining steps that stopped at the door, and carriage-wheels that never came any nearer, but not communicating to each other what they thought. When Janet's clearing away was over, she still found things to do to keep her in movement. On ordinary occasions, when the work was done, she would sit down in the big chair by the window with the door open (it was natural that the door should be open at all seasons), and take up the big blue-worsted stocking which she was always knitting for Peter. And if Joyce was busy, Janet would nod to her friends as they passed, and point with her thumb over her shoulder to show the need of quiet, which did not hinder a little subdued talk, all the more pleasant for being thus kept in check. 'She's aye busy,' the passers-by would say, with looks of admiring wonder. 'Oh ay, she's aye busy; there was never the like of her for learning. She's just never done,' the proud old woman would say, with a pretence at impatience. How proud she had been of all her nursling's wonderful ways! But now Janet could not sit down. She flung her stocking into a corner out of her way. She could not bear to see or speak to any one: the vicinity of other people was of itself an offence to her. If only she could quench with the sound of her steps those of the messenger of fate who was coming; if only she could keep him out for ever, and defend the treasure in her house behind that closed door!

The same suppressed fever of suspense was in Joyce's mind, but in a different sense. With her all was impatience and longing. When would they come? though she knew not whom or what she looked for. When would this silence of fate be broken? The loud ticking of the clock filled the little house with a sound quite out of proportion to its importance, beating out the little lives of men with a methodical slow regularity, every minute taking so long; and the quick short steps of her old guardian never coming to an end, still bustling about when Joyce knew there was no longer anything to do, provoked her almost beyond bearing. So long as this went on, how could she hear *them* coming to the door? .

They both started violently when at last there fell a sharp stroke, as of the end of a whip, on the closed door. It came as

suddenly, and, to their exaggerated fancy, as solemnly, as the very stroke of fate : but it was only a footman from Bellendean, on horseback, with a note, which he almost flung at Janet as she opened the door, stopping Joyce, who sprang forward to do it. 'Na, you'll never open to a flunkey,' cried the old woman, with a sort of desperation in her tone, pushing back the girl, whose cheeks she could see were flaming and her eyes blazing. Janet would not give up the note till she had hunted for her spectacles and put them on, and turned it over in her hand. 'Oh ay, it's to you after a,' she said ; 'I might have kent that,—and no a very ceevil direction. "Miss Joyce," nothing but Miss Joyce : and its nae name when you come to think on't—no' like Marg'et or Mary. It's as if it was your last name.'

'Granny,' said Joyce, in great excitement, 'we are to go to the House immediately, to see Mrs. Bellendean.'

'We—are to gang ? Gang then,' said Janet ; 'naebody keeps ye. So far as I can judge, what with one call and another, you're there 'maist every day.'

'But never, never on such a day as this ! And you are to come too. Granny, I'll get you your shawl and your bonnet.'

'Bide a moment. What for are ye in such a hurry ? I'm no' at Mrs. Bellendean's beck and call, to go and come as she pleases. You can go yoursel', as you've done many a time before.'

'Granny,' cried Joyce, putting her arm, though the old woman resisted, round Janet's shoulders, 'you'll not refuse me ? Think what it may be,—to hear about my mother—and who I am—and whom I belong to.'

'Ay,' said Janet bitterly ; 'to hear when you're to drive away in your grand carriage, and leave the house that's aye been your shelter desolate ; to fix the moment when them that have been father and mother to ye are to be but twa puir servant-bodies, and belang to ye nae mair !'

'Granny !' cried Joyce, in consternation, drawing Janet's face towards her, stooping over the little resisting figure.

'Dinna put your airms about me. Do you ken what I'll be for you the morn ?—your auld nurse—a puir auld body that will be nothing to you. Oh, and that's maybe just what should be for a leddy like you. You were aye a leddy from the beginning, and I might have kent if my een hadna been blinded. I aye said to Peter, "Haud a loose grip," but, eh ! I never took it to mysel'.'

'Granny,' cried Joyce, 'do you think if the Queen herself were my mother,—if I were the Princess Royal, and everything at my beck and call,—do you think I could ever forsake you ?'

'Oh, how do I ken?' cried Janet, still resisting the soft compulsion which was in Joyce's arms; 'and how can I tell what ye will be let do? You will no' be your ain mistress as ye have been here. Ye will have to conform to other folks' ways. Ye will have to do what's becoming to your rank and your place in the world. If ye think that an auld wife in Bellendean village and an auld ploughman on the laird's farm will be let come near ye——'

'Granny, granny!' cried Joyce, as Janet's voice, overcome by her own argument, sank into an inarticulate murmur broken by sobs,—'granny, granny! what have I done to make you think I have no heart?—and to give me up, and refuse to stand by me even before there's a thing proved.'

'Me!—refuse to stand by ye?'

'That is just what you are doing—or at least it is what you are saying you will do; but as you never did an unkind thing in your life——'

'Oh, many a one, many a one,' cried the old woman. 'I've just an unregenerate heart—but no' to my ain.'

'As you never did an unkind thing in your life,' cried Joyce, out of breath, for she had hurried in the meantime to the aumry—the great oak cupboard which filled one side of the room—and made a rapid raid therein. 'I have brought you your bonnet and your shawl.'

She proceeded to fold the big Paisley shawl as Janet wore it, with a large point descending to the hem of the old woman's gown, and to put it round her shoulders. And then the large black satin bonnet, like the hood of a small carriage, was tied over Janet's cap. It is true she wore only the cotton gown, her everyday garment, but the heavy folds of the shawl almost covered it, and Janet was thus equipped for any grandeur that might happen, and very well dressed in her own acceptation of the word. When these solemn garments were produced she struggled no more.

But though the ice was partially broken, there was very little said between them as they went up the avenue. Joyce's heart went bounding before her, forestalling the disclosure, making a hundred mad suggestions. She forgot all the circumstances,—where she was going, and even the unwilling companion by her side, who plodded along, scarcely able to keep up with her, her face altogether invisible within the shadow of the big bonnet, which stooped forward like the head of some curious uncouth flower. Poor old Janet! the girl's head was full of a romance

more thrilling than any romance she had ever read ; but Janet's was tragedy, far deeper, sounding every depth of despair, rising to every height of self-abnegation. And Peter ! poor old Peter, who had no suspicion of anything, whom she had always adjured to keep a loose grip, and to whom 'the bit lassie' was as the light of his eyes. Not only her own desolation, but his also, Janet would have to bear. She had no heart to speak, but plodded along, scarcely even seeing Joyce by her side, ruminating heavily, turning over everything in her mind, with her eyes fixed upon the ground under the shadow of the black bonnet. 'Oh, haud a loose grip !' she had said it to Peter, but she had not laid her own advice to heart.

There were two or three servants in the hall when Joyce went up the steps, leading, against her will, the old woman with her, who would fain have stolen round to the servants' entrance as 'mair becoming.' And the butler and the footman looked very important, and were strangely respectful, having heard Colonel Hayward's oration, or such echo of it as had been wafted to the servants' hall. 'This way, this way, Miss Joyce,' the butler said, with a little emphasis, though he had known her all his life, and seldom used such extreme civility of address. 'This way, Janet.' They were taken across the hall, where Janet, roused and wondering, saw visions of other people glancing eagerly at Joyce, and at her own little figure, stiff as if under mail in the panoply of that great shawl—to Mrs. Bellendean's room. There a little party of agitated people were gathered together. Mrs. Hayward seated very square, with her feet firm on the carpet : Mrs. Bellendean leaning over her writing-table, with a very nervous look : the Colonel standing against the big window, which exaggerated his outline, but made his features undiscernible. Janet made them a sort of curtsey as she went in, but held her head high, rather defiant than humble. For why should she be humble, she who had all the right on her side, and who owed nobody anything ? It was they who should be humble to her if they were going to take away her child. But she could not but say the gentleman was very civil. He put out a chair for her. As she said afterwards, not the little cane one that Mr. Brown, the butler, thought good enough, but a muckle soft easy-chair, a' springs and cushions, like the one his wife was sitting in. He didna seem to think that was ower good for the like of her. Joyce did not sit down at all. She stood with her hand upon Mrs. Bellendean's table, looking into the agitated face of the lady to whom she had always looked up as her best friend.

'You have got something to tell me?' said Joyce, her voice trembling a little. 'About my mother—about my—people?'

'Yes, Joyce.'

The girl said nothing more. She did not so much as look at Mrs. Hayward, who sat nervously still, not making a movement. Joyce supported herself upon the back of the writing-table, which had a range of little drawers and pigeon-holes. She stood up, straight and tall, the flexible lines of her slim figure swaying a little, her hands clasped upon the upper ledge. Her hands were not, perhaps, very white in comparison with the hands of the young ladies who did nothing; but, coming out of her dark dress, which had no ornament of any kind, these hands clasped together looked like ivory or mother-of-pearl, and seemed to give out light. And then there was an interval of tremulous silence. Old Janet, watching them all with the keenest scrutiny, said to herself, 'Will nobody speak?'

'Joyce,' Mrs. Bellendean said at last, with a trembling voice, 'it will be a great, great change for you. You are a wise, good girl; you will not let it alter you to those who—deserve all your gratitude. My dear, it is a wonderful thing to think of. I can but think the hand of Heaven is in it.' Here the poor lady, who had been speaking in slow and laboured tones, struggling against her emotion, became almost inaudible, and stopped, while old Janet, wringing her hands, cried out without knowing she did so, 'Oh, will naeboddy put us out o' our agony? Oh, will naeboddy tell us the truth?'

The Colonel made a step forward, then went back again. His child, his dead wife's child, filled him with awe. The thought of going up to her, taking her into his arms, which would have been the natural thing which he had meant to do, appalled him as he stood and looked at her, a young lady whom he did not know. What would she say or think? There had been nothing to lead up to it, as there was when he had met her in the morning, and when his heart had gone forth to her. Now anxiety and a sort of alarm mingled with his emotion. What would she think? his daughter—and yet a young lady whom he did not know? 'Elizabeth?' he said tremulously, but he could say no more.

'Young lady,' said another voice behind, with a touch of impatience in it,—'Joyce: it appears I must tell, though I have never seen you before.'

Joyce had all but turned her back upon this lady, who, she thought, could have nothing to do with her. She turned round

with a little start, and fixed her eyes upon the new speaker. It was curious that a stranger should tell her—one who had nothing to do with it. The little woman rose up, not a distinguished figure, looking commonplace to the girl's excited eyes, who felt almost impatient, annoyed by this interference. 'Joyce,' Mrs. Hayward repeated again, 'we don't even know each other, but we shall have a great deal to do with each other, and I hope—I hope we shall get on. Your poor mother—was Colonel Hayward's first wife before he married me. He is not to blame, for he never knew. Joyce: your name is Joyce Hayward. You are my husband's daughter. Your father stands there. I don't know why he doesn't come forward. He is the best man that ever was born. You will love him when you know him—— I don't know why he doesn't come forward,' cried his wife, in great agitation. She made herself a sudden stop, caught Joyce by the arm, and raising herself on tiptoe gave the girl a quick kiss on the cheek. 'I am your step-mother, and I hope—I hope that we will get on.'

Joyce stood like a figure turned to stone. She felt the world whirling round her as if she were coming down, down some wonderful fall, too giddy and sickening to estimate. The colour and the eagerness went out of her face. She took no notice of Mrs. Hayward, whose interference at this strange moment she did not seem to understand, although she understood clearly all that she said. Her eyes were fixed, staring at the man there against the window, who was her father. Her father! Her heart had been very soft to him this morning, when she believed he was her mother's friend: but her father!—this was not how she had figured her father. He stood against the light, his outline all wavering and trembling, making a hesitating step towards her, then stopping again. Colonel Hayward was more agitated than words could say. Oh, if he had but taken her in his arms in the morning when his heart was full! He came forward slowly, faltering, not knowing what to say. When he had come close to her, he put out his hands. 'Joyce!' he said, 'you are your mother's living image: I saw it from the first; have you—have you nothing—to say to me?'

'Sir,' said Joyce, making no advance, 'my mother—must have had much to complain of—from you.'

His hands, which he had held out, with a quiver in them, fell to his sides. 'Much to complain of,' he said, with a tremulous astonishment; 'much—to complain of!'

A murmur of voices sounded in Joyce's ears; they sounded like the hum of the bees, or anything else inarticulate, with

mingled tones of remonstrance, anger, entreaty: even old Janet's quavering voice joined in. To hear the girl defying a gentleman, the Captain's colonel, a grand soldier officer, took away the old woman's breath.

'You left her to die,' cried Joyce, her soft voice fierce in excitement, 'all alone in a strange place. Why was she alone at such a time, when she had a husband to care for her? You left her to die—and never asked after her for twenty years: never asked—till her child was a grown-up woman with other—other parents, and another home—of her own.'

'Oh, dinna speak to the gentleman like that!' cried old Janet, getting up with difficulty from her easy-chair. 'Oh, Joyce, Joyce!' cried Mrs. Bellendean. Mrs. Hayward said nothing, but she came up to the indignant young figure in the centre of this group, and laid an imperative hand upon her arm. Joyce shook it off. She did not know what she was doing. An immense disappointment, horror, anger with fate and all about her, surged up in her heart, and gave force to the passion of indignant feeling of which, amid all her thinkings on the subject, she had never been conscious before. She turned away from the three women who surrounded her, each remonstrating in her way, and confronted once more the man—the father—whose great fault perhaps was that he was not the father whom the excited girl looked for, and that the disillusion was more than she could bear.

Colonel Hayward came to himself a little as he looked at her, and recovered some spirit. 'I don't blame you,' he said, 'for thinking so. No, Elizabeth, don't blame her. I was in India. Short of deserting, I couldn't get home.'

'Why didn't you desert, then,' cried the girl in a flush of nervous passion, 'rather than let her die?' Then she turned round upon Janet, who stood behind, burdened with her great shawl, and threw herself upon the old woman's shoulder. 'Oh granny, granny, take me home, take me home again! for I have nothing to do here, nor among these strange folk,' she cried.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was no one who could detain her, for the agitated group in Mrs. Bellendean's room were too much taken by surprise, in this curious development of affairs, to do anything but gaze astonished at Joyce's unlooked-for passion. She went out of the room and out of the house, with old Janet, in her big shawl, following humbly, like a tall ship carrying out a humble little lugger in her train. Joyce seemed to have added to her stature in the intensity of her excitement. The nervous swiftness with which she moved, the air of passion in all her sails, to continue the metaphor, the unity of impassioned movement with which she swept forth—not looking back nor suffering any distracting influence to touch her—made the utmost impression upon the spectators who had been, to their own thinking, themselves chief actors in the scene, until this young creature's surpassing emotion put them all into the position of audience while she herself filled the stage. Joyce would not see her father's face, though it appealed to her with a keen touch of unaccustomed feeling which was like a stab—nor would she suffer herself to look at Mrs. Bellendean, whose faintest indication of a wish had hitherto been almost law to the enthusiast. The girl was possessed by a tempest of personal excitement which carried her far beyond all the habitual restraints and inducements of her life. Nothing weighed with her, nothing moved her, but that overwhelming tide which carried her forth, wounded, humiliated, indignant, angry, she could not tell why, in the desperation of this most bitter and entirely unreasonable disappointment which swept her soul. To think that it had come, the long-looked-for discovery—the revelation so often dreamt of—and that it should be this! Only a visionary, entirely abandoned to the devices of fancy by the bareness of all the facts that surrounded actual life in her experience, could have entertained such a vague grandeur of expectation, or could have fallen into such an abyss of disen-

chantment. It thrilled through and through her, giving a pride and loftiness indescribable to the carriage of her head, to the attitude of her person, to the swift and nervous splendour of her movements. Joyce, stung to the heart with her disappointment—with the *bourdonnement* in her ears and the jar in her nerves of a great downfall—was like a creature inspired. She swept out of the house, and crossed the open space of the drive, and disappeared in the shadows of the avenue, without a word, with scarcely a breath—carried along by that wind of passion, unconscious what she did.

Old Janet Matheson followed her child with feelings of almost equal intensity, but of a contradictoriness and mingled character which defies description. Her despair in the anticipation of losing Joyce was mingled with elation in the thought that Joyce was proved a lady beyond all possibility of doubt, fit to be received as an equal in the grand society at the House—which, however, in no way modified her profound and passionate sense of loss and anger against the fate which she declared to herself bitterly she had always foreseen. That she should not have felt a momentary joy in her child's apparent rejection of the new life opening before her was impossible; but that too was mingled still more seriously by regret and alarm lest the girl should do anything to forfeit these advantages, and also by the dictates of honest judgment which showed her that resistance was impossible, and that it was foolish, and Joyce's revolt a mere blaze of temporary impulse which could not, and must not, stand against the necessities of life. All these mixed and contradictory sentiments were in Janet's mind as she hurried along, trying vainly to keep up with the swift, impassioned figure in front of her; trying, too, to reason with the unreasonable, and bring Joyce—strange travesty of all the usual circumstances of her life—to bring Joyce, the quick-witted, the all-understanding, to see what was right and wrong, what was practicable and impracticable. Her efforts in this respect were confined at present to a breathless interjection now and then—'Oh, Joyce!' 'Oh, my dear!' 'Oh, my bonnie woman!' in various tones of remonstrance and deprecation. But Joyce's impulse of swift passion lasted long and carried her far, straight down the long avenue, and out into the village road beyond; and her mind was so preoccupied that she did not take into consideration the fatigue and trouble of her companion, as, under any other circumstances, Joyce would have been sure to do. It was only when the sight of the village houses, and the contact once more with other human creatures, and the necessary reticences of life suddenly

checked Joyce in her career, that she slackened her pace, and, turning round to keep her face from the keen investigation of some neighbours grouped around a door, suddenly perceived a little behind her the flushed cheeks and labouring breath of Janet, who would not be separated from her side, and yet had found the effort of keeping up with her so difficult. Joyce turned back to her faithful old friend with a cry of self-reproach.

'Oh, granny! and I've tired you struggling after me, and had not the sense to mind.'

'Oh ay, you have the sense to mind. You have sense for most things in this world—but no' the day, Joyce, no' the day; you havena shown your sense the day.'

'Granny,' said Joyce, with trembling lips, 'there has been nothing in my life till now that you have not had all authority in: but you must say nothing about this. I must be the judge in this. It is my business, and only mine.'

'There is nothing,' said Janet, 'that can be your business and no' mine: until the time comes when you yoursel' are none of my business—when you're in your father's hands.'

'Oh no, no,' said Joyce under her breath, clasping her hands, —'oh no, no, no!'

'What are you murmurin' and saying ower as if it was a charm? No, you havena shown your sense. You think the like of that can be at your pleasure to tak' it or to leave it? Na, na, my bonnie woman. I'm the one that will have the most to bear. Ye needna answer me, though I can see the words in your mouth. I'm the one, whatever happens, that will have the maist to put up with. But I say it's no' at your pleasure. What's richt is richt, and what's nature is nature, whatever ye may say. I tell ye, Joyce Matheson—but you're no Joyce Matheson: eh! to think me, that never used it, that I should gie ye that name noo! Ye're Joyce Matheson nae mair.

'Granny, granny, don't throw me off—don't cast me away, for I've nobody but you,' cried Joyce, with a voice full of tears.

'Mé cast ye off! but it's true ye've nae richt to the name, and Peter and me, we've nae richt to you; and the moment's come which I've aye foreseen: oh, I have foreseen it! I never deceivit mysel' like him, or made up dreams and visions like you. And it's no' at your command to tak' it or to leave it—na, na. I'm no' one that can deceive mysel',' said Janet, mournfully shaking her head, and in the depth of her trouble finding a little sad satisfaction in her own clear-sightedness. 'The rest o' ye may think that heaven and earth will yield to ye, and that what ye want is

the thing ye will get if ye stand to it ; but no' me—oh, no' me ! It's little comfort to the flesh to see sae clear, but I canna help it, for it's my nature. Na, na. We canna just go back to what we were before, as if nothing had happened. It's no' permitted. Ye may do a heap o' things in this world, but ye canna go back. Na, na. Yesterday's no dead, nor ye canna kill it, whatever ye may do. It's mair certain than the day or the morn, and it binds ye whether ye like it or no,—oh, it binds ye, it binds ye ! We canna go back.'

These little sentences came from her at intervals with breaks and pauses between, as they went along towards the cottage, sometimes interrupted by an exclamation from Joyce, sometimes by the greeting of a neighbour, sometimes by Janet's own breathlessness as she laboured along in the warm evening under the weight of her big shawl. Such monologues were not unusual to her, and Joyce had accompanied them by a commentary of half-regarded questions and exclamations, in all the mutual calm of family understanding on many a previous occasion. The girl had not lent a very steady ear to the grandmother's wisdom, nor had the grandmother paused to answer the girl's questions or remonstrances. Half heard, half noted, they had gone on serenely, the notes of age and experience mingling with the dreams and impulses of youth. But that soft concert and harmony in which the two voices had differed without any jar, supplementing and completing each other, was not like this. The old woman was flushed and tearful, and Joyce was pale, with excited eyes that looked twice as large as usual, and a trembling in the lips which were so apt to move with impatient intelligence, answering before the question was made. It was apparent even to the neighbours that something must have happened, and still more apparent to Peter, who stood at the open door of the cottage looking out for them with a look which varied from the broad smile of pleasure with which he had perceived their two familiar figures approaching, to a troubled perception of something amiss which he could not fathom. Peter's mind was slow in operating ; and as all previous information had been kept from him, he was without any clue to the origin of the trouble which he began to feel about him. To return and find the cottage closed, and neither wife nor child waiting for him, was in itself a prodigy ; and though his astonishment had been partly calmed by the explanation of the neighbours who gave him the key of the door, and informed him that Joyce and her granny had been sent for to ' the Hoose,' it was roused into a kind of dull anxiety by the agitated air which he slowly recognised as he watched them approaching, convinced, against his will, that something ailed them,—that some

new event had happened. Nevertheless, Peter, in the voiceless delicacy of his peasant soul, assumed the smile, trembling on the edge of a laugh, which was his usual aspect when addressing his womenfolk.

'Weel,' he said, 'ye're bonnie hoosekeepers for a man to come hame to, wanting his tea! 'Deed, I might just whistle for my tea, and the twa of you stravaigin' naebody kens where. Joyce, my bonny lass, ye should just think shame of yoursel', leading your auld granny into ill ways.' He ended with a long, low laugh, which was his expression of content and emotion and pleasure, and which turned the reproach into the tenderest family jest—and made way for them, but not till he had said out his say. 'Come awa,' no' ye're here; come awa' ben, and mask the tea: for I'm wanting something to sloken me,' he said.

'Oh, my poor man—oh, my poor auld man!' said Janet. She had not ceased to shake her head at intervals while he was speaking, and she uttered a suppressed groan as she went into the cottage. So long as all was uncertain, Janet had carefully kept every intimation of possible calamity from Peter; but now that the truth must be known, she had a kind of tragic pleasure in exciting his alarm.

'What ails the woman?' he said, 'girnin' and groanin' as if we were a' under sentence. What ails your granny, Joyce?'

'And so we are,' said Janet, 'a' under sentence, as ye say, and our days numbered, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. But, eh, that's no' what we do—far, far from it. And when misfortin' comes, that comes to a', it's rare, rare that it doesn't come unexpected. We're eatin' and drinkin' and makin' merry—or else we're fechtin', beatin' our fellow-servants, and a' in a word that the Lord delayeth his comin'. And in a moment,' said the old woman, with a sob, 'our house is left unto us desolate. That's just the common way.'

'What is she meaning with the house left desolate?' said Peter, the smile slowly disappearing from his face. 'The woman's daft! Joyce what is she meanin'? I'm no' very gleg at the uptake,—no' like you, my bonnie woman, that are just as keen as a needle. What's she meanin'? Janet, woman, as lang as the lassie is weel and spared——'

'The lassie, says he—nacthing but the lassie. And have I no' foreseen it a' the time? How often have I cried out to ye, Peter, to keep a loose grip! oh, to hand a loose grip! But ye never would listen to me. And now it's just come to pass, and neither you nor me prepared.'

Peter's face, gazing at her while she went on, was like a landscape in the uncertain shining of a Scotch summer. It lightened all over with a smile of good-humoured derision which brought out the shaggy eyebrows, the grizzled whiskers, the cavernous hollows round the eyes, like the inequalities of the mountainous land. And then the light fled instantaneously, and a pale blank of shadow succeeded, leaving all that surface grey, while finer lines of anxiety and chill alarm developed about the large mouth and in the puckers of those many-folded eyelids, like movements of the wind among the herbage and trees. He stood and gazed at her with his eyes widely open, his lips apart. But Janet did not meet that look. She went to the fire, which burned dully, 'gathered,' as she had left it in her careful way, to smoulder frugally in her absence, and poked it with violence, with sharp thrusts of the poker, standing with the back of her great shawl turned towards her companions, and her big bonnet still on her head. There was nothing said till with those sudden strokes and blows she had roused the dormant fire to flame, when she put on the kettle, and swept the hearth with vigorous, nervous movements, though always encumbered by the weight of the shawl. Then Janet made a sudden turn upon herself, and setting open the doors of the aumry, which made a sort of screen between her and the others, proceeded to take off and fold away that shawl of state. 'I'll maybe never put it on again,' she said to herself, almost under her breath, 'for whatfor should I deck mysel' and fash my heid about my claes or what I put on? It was a' to be respectable for her: wha's heeding when there's nane but me?'

'There's something happened,' said Peter, in his low tremulous bass, like the rolling of distant thunder. 'Am I the maister of this hoose, and left to find oot by her parables and her metaphors, and no' a word of sense that a man can understand? What is't, woman? Speak plain out, or as sure's death I'll——' He clenched his large fist with a sudden silent rage, which could find no other expression than this seeming threat—though Peter would have died sooner than touch with a finger to harm her the old companion of his life.

'Grandfather,' said Joyce, 'I will tell you what has happened. Granny takes a thing into her head, and then you know, whatever we say, you or me, she never heeds, but follows her own fancy.' The girl spoke quickly, her words hurrying, her breath panting,—then came to a sudden pause, flushed crimson, her paleness changing to the red of passionate feeling, and added, as slowly as she had been hurried before, 'Somebody has been here—that

knows who my mother was : somebody that says—that says he is my father. And she thinks I am to rise up and follow him,' cried Joyce, in another burst of sudden, swift, vehement words,—‘to rise up and follow him, like the woman in the Old Testament, away from my home and my own people, and all that I care for in the world ! But I'll not do it—I'll not do it. I'll call no strange man my father. I'll bide in my own place where I've been all my days. What are their letters, and their old stories, and their secrets that they've found out, and their injuries that they're sorry for—sorry for after costing a woman's life ! What's all that to me ? I'll bide in my own place with them that have nourished me and cherished me, and made me happy all my days.'

‘Eh, lassie ! eh, lassie !’ was all Peter could say. His large old limbs had got a trembling in them. He sat down in the big wooden arm-chair which stood against the wall, where it had been put away after dinner, and from that unaccustomed place, as if he too had been put away out of the common strain of life, gazed at the two alternately,—at his wife still folding, folding that shawl that would not lie straight, and at Joyce, in her flush of impassioned determination, standing up drawn to her full height, her head thrown back, her slim young figure inspired by the rush and torrent of emotion which she herself scarcely understood in its vehemence and force. The little quiet, humble cottage was in a moment filled as with rushing wings and flashing weapons, the dust and jar of spiritual conflict : but not one of the three visible actors in this little tragic drama had for the moment a word to say. When this silence of fate was broken, it was by Janet, who had at last shut up her shawl in the aumry, and, coming and going from the fire to the table, filling the intense blank of that pause with a curious interlude of hasty sound and movement, said at last, almost fiercely, ‘Come to your tea. You'll do little good standing glowering at ane anither. Sit down and tak' your tea.'

CHAPTER XIV

THE first day of the holidays had also been a delight to Mr. Andrew Halliday's virtuous soul. More systematic in all he did than Joyce's irregular impulses permitted her to be, he had taken advantage of the leisure of the morning to enjoy to the utmost the quietness and freedom of a man who has no rule but his own pleasure for the government of his time. He got up a little later than usual, lingered over his breakfast, exhausted the newspaper over which, on ordinary occasions, he could cast only a hurried glance, and tasted the sweetness of that pause of occupation as no habitually unoccupied man could ever do. Then he sallied forth, not, as Joyce did, to dream and muse, but to enjoy the conscious pleasure of a walk, during which, indeed, he turned over many things in his mind which were not unallied to happy dreams. For Andrew had come to a determination which filled him at once with sweet and tender fancies, and with the careful calculations of a prudent man in face of a great change in life. He had made up his mind to insist upon a decision from Joyce, to have the time of their marriage settled. Of this she had never permitted him to speak. Their engagement had been altogether of a highly refined and visionary kind, a sort of bond of intellectual sympathy which pleased and flattered the consciousness of superiority in Halliday's mind, but in other respects was sometimes a little chilly, and so wanting in all warmer demonstration as to carry with it a perpetual subdued disappointment and tremor of uncertainty. Had not the schoolmaster possessed a great deal of self-approval and conscious worth, he might have sometimes lost confidence altogether in Joyce's affection; but though he was often uncomfortable with a sensation of having much kept from him which was his due, he had not as yet come so far as to be able to imagine that Joyce was indifferent to him. He could not have done her that wrong. She had met nobody, could have met nobody,

who was his equal, and how was it possible then that she could be unfaithful? It seemed to Halliday a wrong to Joyce to suppose her capable of such a lamentable want of judgment.

But he was heartily in love with her at the same time, as well as so much with himself, and the *régime* under which she held him was cold. He had become impatient of it, and very anxious to bring it to an end: and there was no reason, except her fantastic unreadiness, for delay. He said to himself that he must put a stop to it,—that he must step forward in all the decision of his manhood, and impress this determination upon the weaker feminine nature which was made to yield to his superior force and impulse. There was no reason in the world for delay. He had attained all the promotion which was likely for a long time to be his; and the position of schoolmistress in his parish was likely to be soon vacant, which would afford to Joyce the possibility of carrying on her professional work, and adding to their joint means, as no doubt she would insist upon doing. This was not a thing which Halliday himself would have insisted upon. He felt profoundly that to be able to keep his wife at home, and retain her altogether like a garden enclosed for his private enjoyment, was a supreme luxury, and one which it was the privilege of the superior classes alone to prize at its proper value. He had been a prudent young man all his life, and had laid by a little money, and he felt with a proud and not ungenerous expansion of his bosom that he was able to afford himself that luxury; but he doubted greatly whether it would be possible to bring Joyce to perceive that this was the more excellent way, and that it would be meet for her to give up her work and devote herself entirely to her husband. He comprehended something of her pride, her high independence, and even indulgently allowed for the presence in her of a great deal of that ambition which is more appropriate to a man than a woman; therefore he was prepared to yield the question in respect to the work, and to find a new element of satisfaction in the thought of placing her by his own side in the little rostrum of the school as well as in the seclusion of the home. The Board would be too glad to secure the services of Miss Matheson, so well known for her admirable management at Bellendean, as the mistress at Comely Green. And thus every exigency would be satisfied.

He went over his little house carefully, room by room, when he came in from his walk, and considered what it would be necessary to add, and what to repair and refresh, for Joyce's reception. His mind was a thoroughly frugal and prudent one, tempted by no vain desires, spoiled by no habits of extravagance.

Amid all the fond visions which filled him, as he realised the new necessities of a double life, he yet calculated very closely what would be necessary, what they could do without, how many things were strictly needful, and how and at what price these additions could be procured. The calculations were full of enchantment, but they were not reckoned up less carefully. He returned to them after he had eaten his dinner, and they occupied the greater part of the afternoon, with many an excursion into the realms of fancy to sweeten them, although of themselves they were sweet. And it was with the result of his calculations carefully jotted down upon a piece of paper in his pocket-book, that he set out before tea-time for Bellendean, to make known to Joyce his desires and determination, and to sway her mind as the female mind ought to be swayed, half by sweet persuasion, half by the magnetism of his superior force of impulse, to adopt it as her own. The idea that she might insist, and decline to be influenced, was one which he would not allow himself to take into consideration, though it lay in the background in one of the chambers of his mind with a sort of chill sense of unpleasant possibility, which, so far as possible, he put out of sight.

It was a lovely afternoon, and the road from Comely Green to Bellendean lay partly by the highroad within sight of the Firth, and partly through the woods and park of Bellendean House. Everything was cheerful round him, the birds singing, the water reflecting the sunshine in jewelled lines of sparkle and light. Andrew could not think of any such black thing as refusal, or even reluctance, amid all the sweet harmony and consent to be happy, which was in the lovely summer day.

When he reached the cottage it gave him a little thrill of surprise to find the door shut which usually stood so frankly open, admitting the genial summer atmosphere and something of the sights and sounds outside. It was strange to find the door closed on a summer evening; and an idea that somebody must be ill, or that something must have happened, sprang into instant life in Andrew's mind. His knock was not even answered by the invitation to come in, which would have been natural in other circumstances. He heard a little movement inside, but no cheerful sound of voices, and presently the door was opened by Janet, who, looking out upon him with a jealous glance through a very small opening, breathed forth an 'Oh! it's you, Andrew;' and, letting the door swing fully open, bade him come in. Within he was bewildered to see old Peter and Joyce seated at the table, upon which the tea-things still stood. There they were all three,

nobody ill, no visible cause for this extraordinary seclusion. Peter gave him a grim little nod without speaking, and Joyce put forth—it almost seemed unwillingly—her hand, but without moving otherwise. He took the chair from which Janet had risen, and gazed at them bewildered. ‘What is the matter? Has anything happened?’ he said.

There was a pause. Peter drummed upon the table with his fingers, with something almost derisive in the measured sound; and Joyce half turned to him as if about to speak, but said nothing. It was Janet who answered his question. There was a hot flush upon her cheeks—the flush of excitement and emotion. She answered him shaking her head.

‘Ay, Andrew, there’s something happened. We’re no’ like oursel’s, as ye can see. Ye wouldna have gotten in this night to this afflicted house if ye had not been airt and pairt in it as weel as Peter and me.’

‘What is the matter?’ he repeated, with increased alarm.

‘Ye better tell him, Joyce. Puir lad, he has a richt to hear. He’s maybe thought like me of sic a thing happening, without fear, as if it might be a kind of diversion. The Lord help us short-sighted folk.’

‘What is it?’ he said; ‘you are driving me distracted. What has happened?’

Upon this Peter gave a short, dry laugh, which it was alarming to hear. ‘He’ll never find out,’ said the old man, ‘if ye give him years to do it. It’s against reason—it’s against sense—a man to step in and take another man’s bairn away.’

Joyce was very pale. He observed this for the first time in the confusion and the trouble of this incomprehensible scene. She sat with her hands clasped, looking at no one—not even at himself, though she had given him her hand. It was rare, indeed, that Joyce should be the last to explain. Halliday drew his chair a little nearer, and put his hand timidly upon hers, which made her start. She made a quick movement, as if to draw it away, then visibly controlled herself and permitted that mute interrogation and caress.

‘It is just what I aye kent would happen,’ said Janet, unconscious or indifferent to her self-contradictions; ‘and many a time have I implored my man no’ to build upon her, though I wasna so wise as to tak’ my ain advice. And as for you, Andrew, though I took good care you should hear a’ the circumstances, maybe I should have warned you mair clearly that you should no’ lippen to her, and ware a’ your heart upon her, when at ainy moment—

at ainy moment——' Here the old woman's voice failed her, and broke off in a momentary, much-resisted sob. Halliday's astonishment and anxiety grew at every word. His hand pressed Joyce's hand with the increasing fervour of an eager demand.

'Joyce! Joyce! what do they mean? Have you nothing to say.'

Joyce turned upon him, with a sudden flush taking the place of her paleness. 'Granny would make you think that I was not worthy to be trusted,' she said; 'that to ware your heart upon me, as she says, was to be cheated and betrayed.'

'No, no,—I never could believe that!' he cried, not unwilling to prove the superiority of his own trust to that of the old people, who, Halliday felt, it would not be a bad thing to be clear of, or as nearly clear of as circumstances might permit.

Joyce scarcely paused to hear his response, but, having found her voice, went on hurriedly. 'People have come that say—that say—— They are just strangers—we never saw them before. They say that I—I—belong to them. Oh, I am not going to pretend,' cried Joyce, 'that I have not thought of that happening, many a day! It was like a poem all to myself. It went round and round in my head. It was a kind of dream. But I never thought—I never, never thought what would become of me if it came true. And how do I know that it is true? Grandfather, you and granny are my father and my mother. I never knew any other. You have brought me up and cared for me, and I am your child to the end of my life. I will never, never——'

'Hold your peace!' cried Janet. She put up her hard hand against Joyce's soft young mouth. The little old woman grew majestic in her sense of justice and right. 'Hold your peace!' she cried. 'Make no vows, lest you should be tempted to break them and sin against the Lord. Ye'll do what it's your duty to do. You'll no' tell me this and that—that you'll take the law in your ain hands. Haud your tongue, Peter Matheson! You're an auld fool, putting nonsense into the bairn's head. What!' cried Janet, 'a bairn of MINE to say that she'll act as she likes and please hersel', and take her choice what she'll do! and a' the time her duty straight forenenst her, and nae mainner o' doubt what it is. Dinna speak such stuff to me.'

In the pause of this conflict Andrew Halliday's voice came in, astonished, yet composed, with curiosity in it and strong expectation—sentiments entirely different from those which swayed the others, and which silenced them and aroused their attention from the very force of contrast. 'People who say—that you belong to

them? Your own people—your own friends—Joyce! Tell me who they are,—tell me—— You take away my breath. To think that they should have found her after all!’

They all paused in the impassioned strain of their thoughts to look at him. This new note struck in the midst of them was startling and incomprehensible, yet checked the excitement and vehemence of their own feelings. ‘Ah, Andro,’ said old Peter, ‘ye’re a wise man. Ye would like to hear a’ about it, and wha they are, and if the new freends—the new freends’—the old man coughed over the words to get his voice—‘if they’re maybe gränder folk and mair to your credit’—he broke off into his usual laugh, but a laugh harsh and broken. ‘Ye’re a wise lad, Andro, my man—ye’re a wise lad.’

‘It is very natural, I think,’ said Andrew, reddening, ‘that I should wish to know. We have spoken many a time of Joyce’s—friends. I wish to know about them, and what they are, naturally, as any one in my position would do.’

‘Joyce’s freends!—I thoct I kent weel what that meant,’ said Janet. ‘Eh! to hear him speak of Joyce’s freends. I thoct I kent weel what that meant,’ she repeated, with a smile of bitterness. Halliday had taken her seat at the table, and she went and seated herself by the wall at as great a distance from the group as the limits of space would permit. The old woman’s eyes were keen with grief and bitter pain, and that sense of being superseded which is so hard to bear. She thought that Joyce had put her chair a little closer to that of the schoolmaster, detaching herself from Peter, and that the young people already formed a little party by themselves. This was the form her jealous consciousness of Joyce’s superiority had always taken, even when everything went well. She burst forth again in indignant prophetic strains, taking a little comfort in this thought.

‘But dinna you think you’ll get her,’ she cried, ‘no more than Peter or me!—dinna you believe that they’ll think you good enough for her, Andrew Halliday. If it’s ended for us, it’s mair than ended for you. Do you think a grand sodger-officer, that was the Captain’s commander, and high, high up, nigh to the Queen herself,—do you think a man like that will give his daughter—and such a daughter, fit for the Queen’s Court if ever lady was—to a bit poor little parish schoolmaister like you?’

The comfort which Janet took from this prognostication was bitter, but it was great. A curious pride in the grandeur of the officer who was ‘the Captain’s’ commander made her bosom swell. At least there was satisfaction in that, and in the sudden downfall,

the unmitigated and prompt destruction of all hopes that might be entertained by that whippersnapper, who dared to demand explanations on the subject of Joyce's 'friends'—friends in Scotch peasant parlance meaning what 'parents' means in French, the family and nearest relatives. Janet had rightly divined that Halliday received the news not with sympathetic pain or alarm, but with suppressed delight, looking forward to the acquisition to himself, through his promised wife, of 'friends' who would at once elevate him to the rank of gentleman, after which he longed with a consciousness of having no internal right to it, which old Janet's keen instincts had always comprehended—far, far different from Joyce, who wanted no elevation,—who was a lady born.

'Granny,' said Joyce, with a trembling voice, 'you think very little, very, very little—I see it now for the first time—of me.'

'Me think little of ye! that's a bonnie story; but weel, weel I ken what will happen. We will pairt with sore hearts, but a firm meaning to be just the same to ane anither. I've seen a heap of things in my lifetime,' said Janet, with mournful pride. 'Sae has my man; but they havena time to think—they're no' aye turning things ower and ower like a woman at the fireside. I've seen mony changes and pairtings, and how it was aye said it should make no difference. Eh! I've seen that in the maist natural way. It's no' that you'll mean ony unfaithfulness, my bonnie woman. Na, na. I ken ye to the bottom o' your heart, and there's nae unfaithfulness in you—no' even to him,' said Janet, indicating Halliday half contemptuously by a pointing finger, 'much less to your grandfather and me. I'm whiles in an ill key, and I've been sae, I dinna deny it, since ever I heard this awfu' news: but now I am coming to mysel'. Ye'll do your duty, Joyce. Ye'll accept what canna be refused, and ye'll gang away from us with a sair heart, and it will be a' settled that you're to come back, maybe twice a year, maybe ance a year, to Peter and me, and be our ain bairn again. They're no' ill folk,' she went on, the tears dropping upon her apron, on which she was folding hem after hem—'they're good folk; they're kind, awfu' kind—they'll never wish ye to be ungrateful,—that's what they'll say. They'll no' oppose it, they'll settle it a'—maybe a week, maybe a month, maybe mair; they'll be real weel-meaning, real kind. And Peter and me, we'll live a' the year thinking o' that time; and ye'll come back, my bonnie dear—oh, ye'll come back! with your heart licht to think of the pleasure of the auld folk. But, eh Joyce! ye'll no' be in the house a moment till ye'll see the difference; ye'll no' have graspit my hand or looked me in the face till ye see the difference. Ye'll see

the glaur on your grandfaither's shoon when he comes in, and the sweat on his brow. No' with ony unkind meaning. Oh, far frae that—far frae that! Do I no' ken your heart? But ye'll be used to other things—it'll a' have turned strange to ye then—and ye'll see where we're wanting. Oh, ye'll see it! It will just be mair plain to ye than all the rest. The wee bit place, the common things, the neebors a' keen to ken, but chief of us, Peter and me our ainsels, twa common puir folk.'

'Granny!' cried Joyce, flinging herself upon her, unable to bear this gradual working up.

Peter came in with a chorus with his big broken laugh—'Ay, ay, just that, just that! an auld broken-down ploughman and his puir auld body of a wife. It's just that, it's just that!'

CHAPTER XV

GREAT was the consternation in Bellendean over the unsatisfactory interview which it was so soon known had taken place between Joyce and her father. Colonel Hayward's public intimation of the facts at luncheon had created, as might have been expected, the greatest commotion; and the ladies of the party assembled round Mrs. Bellendean with warm curiosity when the whisper ran through the house that Joyce had come—and had gone away again. Gone away! To explain it was very difficult, to understand it impossible. The schoolmistress, the village girl, to discover that she was Colonel Hayward's daughter, and not to be elated, transported by the discovery! Why, it was a romance, it was like a fairy tale. Mrs. Bellendean's suggestion that there was a second side to everything, though the fact was not generally recognised in fairy tales, contented no one; and a little mob of excited critics, all touched and interested by Colonel Hayward's speech, turned upon the rustic heroine and denounced her pretensions. What did she expect, what had she looked for—to turn out a king's daughter, or a duke's? But it was generally agreed that few dukes were so delightful as Colonel Hayward, and that Joyce showed the worst of taste as well as the utmost ingratitude. Mrs. Bellendean was disappointed too; but she was partly comforted by the fact that Captain Bellendean, who was much bewildered by the girl's caprice and folly, had fallen into a long and apparently interesting argument on the subject with Greta, her own special favourite and *protégée*. It is almost impossible for any natural woman to find a man in Norman's position, well-looking, young, and rich, within her range, without forming matrimonial schemes for him of one kind or another; and Mrs. Bellendean had already made up her mind that the pang of leaving Bellendean would be much softened could she see her successor in Greta, the favourite of the house, a girl full of her own partialities and ways of thinking, and whom

she had influenced all her life. She forgot Joyce in seeing the animated discussion that rose between these two. It was disappointing, however, that when in the very midst of this discussion Captain Bellendean saw from the window at which he was standing his old Colonel walking to and fro on the terrace with heavy steps and bowed head, his point of interest changed at once. He looked no more at Greta, though she was a much prettier sight: evidently all his sympathy was for Colonel Hayward; and after the talk had gone on languishing for a few moments, he excused himself for leaving her. 'Poor old chap! I must go and try if I can do anything to console him,' he said.

Norman found Colonel Hayward very much cast down and melancholy. He was pacing up and down, up and down—sometimes pausing to throw a blank look over the landscape, sometimes mechanically gathering a faded leaf from one of the creepers on the wall. He endeavoured to pull himself up when Captain Bellendean joined him; but the old soldier had no skill in concealing his feelings, and he was too anxious to get support and sympathy to remain long silent. He announced, with all the solemnity becoming a strange event, that Mrs. Hayward was lying down a little. 'She travelled all night, you know; and though she can sleep on the railway, it never does one much good that sort of sleep; and there has been a great deal going on all day—a great deal that has been very agitating for us both. I persuaded her to lie down,' Colonel Hayward said, looking at his companion furtively, as if afraid that Norman might think Elizabeth was to blame.

'It was the best thing she could do,' said Captain Bellendean.

'That is exactly what I told her—the very best thing she could do. It is seldom she leaves me when I have so much need of her; but I insisted upon it. And then I am in full possession of her sentiments,' said the Colonel. 'She told me exactly what she thought; and she advised me to take a walk by myself and think it all out.'

'Perhaps, then, I ought to leave you alone, Colonel? but I saw you from the window, and thought you looked out of spirits.'

'My dear boy, I am glad—too glad—to have you. Thinking a thing out is easy to say, but not so easy to do. And you had always a great deal of sense, Bellendean. When we had difficulties in the regiment, I well remember—— But that was easy in comparison with this. You know what has happened. We've found my daughter. For I was married long before I met with my wife. It was only for a little time; and then she disappeared,

poor girl, and I never could find out what became of her. It gave me a very great deal of trouble and distress—more than I could tell you; and now we have found out that she left a child. I told you all to-day at luncheon. Joyce, the girl they all talk about, is my daughter. Can you believe such a story?’

‘I had heard about it before; and then what you said to-day—it is very wonderful.’

‘Yes; but it’s quite true. And we told her—in Mrs. Bellendean’s room. And if you will believe it, she—— She as good as rejected me, Norman—refused to have me for her father. It has thrown me into a dreadful state of confusion. And Elizabeth can’t help me, it appears. She says I must work it out for myself. But it seems unnatural to work out a thing by myself; and especially a thing like this. Yes, the girl would have nothing to say to me, Bellendean. She says I must have ill-treated her mother—poor Joyce! the girl I told you that I had married. And I never did—indeed I never did!’

‘I am sure of that, sir. You never injured any one.’

‘Ah, my dear fellow! you don’t know how things happen. It seems to be nobody’s fault, and yet there’s injury done. It’s very bewildering to me, at my age, to think of having a child living. I never—thought of anything of the kind. I may have wished that my wife—and then again it would seem almost better that it shouldn’t be so.’

Colonel Hayward put his arm within that of Norman; he quickened his pace as they went up and down the terrace, and then would stop suddenly to deliver an emphatic sentence. ‘She looked me in the face, as if she defied me,’ he said, ‘and then went away and left me—with that old woman. Did you ever hear of such a position, Bellendean? My daughter, you know, my own daughter—and she looks me in the face, and tells me I must have harmed her mother, and why did I leave her? and goes away! What am I to do? When you have made such a discovery, there it is; you can’t put it out of your mind, or go upon your way, as if you had never found it out. I can’t be as I was before. I have got a daughter. You may smile, Bellendean, and think it’s just the old fellow’s confused way.’

‘I don’t indeed, sir. I can quite understand the embarrassment——’

‘That’s it—the embarrassment. She belongs to me, and her future should be my dearest care—my dearest care—a daughter, you know, more even than a boy. Just what I have often thought would make life perfect—just a sort of a glory to us,

Elizabeth and me; but when you think of it, quite a stranger, brought up so different! And Elizabeth opposed, a little opposed. I can't help seeing it, though she tries to hide it, telling me that it's my affair—that I must think it out myself. How can I think it out myself? and then my daughter herself turning upon me! What can I do? I don't know what to do!'

'Everybody,' said Captain Bellendean—though a little against the grain, for he was himself very indignant with Joyce—'speaks highly of her; there is but one voice—every one likes and admires her.'

The Colonel gave a little pressure to the young man's arm, as if in thanks, and said with a sigh, 'She is very like her mother. You would say, if you had known her, the very same—more than a likeness. Elizabeth has had a good deal to put up with on that account. You can't wonder if she is a little—opposed. And everything is at a standstill. I have to take the next step; they will neither of them help me—and what am I to do? Children—seem to bring love with them when they are born in a house. But when a grown-up young woman appears that you never saw before, and you are told she is your daughter! It is a dreadful position to be in, Bellendean. I don't know, no more than a baby, what to do.'

'That is rather an alarming view to take,' said Norman. 'But when you know her better, most likely everything will come right. You have a very kind heart, sir, and the young lady is very pretty, and nice, and clever, and nature will speak.'

The Colonel shook his head. 'I believed this morning in nature speaking—but I am sadly shaken, sadly shaken, Bellendean. Why did she turn against me? You would have thought that merely to say, I am your father—but she turned upon me as if I had been her enemy. And what can I do? We can't go away to-morrow and leave her here. We must have her to live with us, and perhaps she won't come, and most likely she'll not like it if she does. I am dreadfully down about it all. Joyce's girl whom I don't know, and Elizabeth, who gives me up and goes to lie down because she's tired—just when I need her most!'

'But, Colonel, it is true that Mrs. Hayward must be very tired: and no doubt she feels that you and Miss Joyce will understand each other better if you meet by yourselves, when she is not there.'

'Eh? Do you think that's what she means, Bellendean? and do you think so too? But even then I am no further advanced than I was before; for my daughter, you know, she's not here,

and how do I know where to find her, even if I were prepared to meet her? and heaven knows I am less prepared than ever—and very nervous and anxious; and if she were standing before me at this moment I don't know what I should say.'

'I can show you where to find her,' said Captain Bellendean. 'Come and see her, sir; you don't want to be prepared—you have only to show her that she may trust to your kind heart, and settle everything before Mrs. Hayward wakes up.'

'My kind heart!' said Colonel Hayward. 'I'm not so sure that my heart is kind—not, it appears, to my own flesh and blood. I feel almost as if I should be glad never to hear of her again.'

'That is only because you are out of sorts, and got no sleep last night.'

'How do you know I got no sleep? It's quite true. Elizabeth thinks I only fancy it, but the truth is that when my mind is disturbed I cannot sleep. I am dreadfully down about it all, Bellendean. No, I haven't the courage, I haven't the courage. If she were to tell me again that her mother had much to complain of, I couldn't answer a word. And yet it's not so. I declare to you, Bellendean, upon my honour, it was no fault of mine.'

'I am sure of it, sir,' said Bellendean. 'Don't think any more of that, but come with me and see Miss Joyce, and settle it all.'

The Colonel said little as he walked down to the village leaning on young Bellendean's arm. He was alarmed and nervous; his throat was dry, his mind was confused. Norman's society, the touch of his arm, the moral force of his companionship, kept Colonel Hayward up to the mark, or it is possible that he might have turned back and fled from those difficulties which he did not feel himself able to cope with, and the new relationship that had already produced such confusion in his life. But he was firmly held by Norman's arm, and did not resist the impulse, though it was not his own. He did not know what he was going to say to Joyce, or how to meet this proud young creature, filled with a fanciful indignation for her mother's wrongs. He had never wronged her mother. Pitiful as the story was, and tenderly as he had always regarded her memory, the Joyce of his youth had been the instrument of her own misery and of much trouble and anguish to him, though the gentle-hearted soldier had accepted it always as a sort of natural calamity for which nobody was responsible, and never blamed her. But even the gentlest-hearted will be moved when the judgment which they have refrained from making is turned against

themselves. It was not his fault, and yet how could he say so? How could he explain it to this second hot-headed Joyce without blaming the first who had so suffered, and over whom death had laid a shadowy veil of tenderness, an oblivion of all mistakes and errors? Colonel Hayward did not articulately discuss this question with himself, but it was at the bottom of all the confusion in his troubled mind. He was afraid of her, shy of her presence, not knowing how to address or approach this stranger, who was his own child. He had looked with a tender envy at other people's daughters before now, thinking if only Elizabeth—— But a daughter who was not Elizabeth's, and to whom his wife was even, as he said to himself, a little—opposed, was something that had never entered into his thoughts. How easy it was in the story-books!—how parents and children long separated sprang into each other's arms and hearts by instinct. But it was very different in real life, when the problem how to receive into the intimacy of so small a household a third person who was so near in blood, so absolutely unknown in all that constitutes human sympathy, had to be solved at a moment's notice! He had been very much excited and disturbed the day before, but he had not doubted the power of Elizabeth to put everything right. Now, however, Elizabeth had not only for the first time failed, but was—opposed. She had not said it, but he had felt it. She had declared herself tired, and lain down, and told him to work it out himself. Such a state of affairs was one which Colonel Hayward had never contemplated, and everything accordingly was much worse than yesterday, when he had still been able to feel that if Elizabeth were only here all would go well.

The party in the cottage were in a very subdued and depressed condition when Captain Bellendean knocked at the door. The heat of resistance in Joyce's mind had died down. Whether it was the strain of argument which Janet still carried on, though Joyce had not consciously listened to it, or whether the mere effect of the short lapse of time which quenches excitement had operated unawares upon her mind, it is certain that her vehemence of feeling and rebellion of heart had sunk into that despondent suspension of thought which exhaustion brings. Resistance dies out, and the chill compulsion of circumstance comes in, making itself felt above all flashes of indignation, all revolts of sentiment. Joyce knew now, though she had not acknowledged it in words, that her power over her own life was gone,—that there was no strength in her to resist the new laws and subordination under which she felt herself to have fallen. She had not even the con-

sciousness which a girl in a higher class might have been supported by, that her father's rights over her were not supreme. She believed that she had no power to resist his decrees as to what was to become of her; and accordingly, after the first outburst of contradictory feeling, the girl's heart and courage had altogether succumbed. She had fallen upon the neck of her old guardian—the true mother of her life—with tears, which quenched out every spark of the passion which had inspired her.

Joyce felt herself to be within the grasp of fate. She was like one of the heroines of the poets in a different aspect from that in which she had identified herself with Rosalind or Miranda. What she was like now was Iphigenia or Antigone caught in the remorseless bonds of destiny. She did not even feel that forlorn satisfaction in it which she might have done had there been more time, or had she been less unhappy. The only feeling she was conscious of was misery, life running low in her, all the elements and powers against her, and the possibility even of resistance gone out of her. Old Janet had pressed her close, and then had repulsed her with the impatience of highly excited feeling; and Joyce stood before the window, with the light upon her pale face, quite subdued, unresistant, dejected to the bottom of her heart. The only one of the group who showed any energy or satisfaction was Andrew Halliday, who could not refrain a rising and exhilaration of heart at the thought of being son-in-law to a man who was the 'Captain's' commanding officer, and consequently occupied a position among the great ones of the earth. Andrew's imagination had already leaped at all the good things that might follow for himself. He thought of possible elevations in the way of head-masterships, scholastic dignities, and honours. 'They' would never leave Joyce's husband a parish schoolmaster! He had not time to follow it out, but his thoughts had swayed swiftly upwards to promotions and honours undefined.

'Wha's that at the door?' said Janet, among her tears.

'It's the Captain,' said Joyce, in a voice so low that she was almost inaudible. Then she added, 'It's—it's—my father.'

'Her father!' Peter rose up with a lowering brow. 'My hoose is no' a place for every fremd person to come oot and in at their pleasure. Let them be. I forbid ainy person to open that door.'

'Oh, haud your tongue, man!' cried Janet; 'can ye keep them oot with a steekit door—them that has the law on their side, and nature too?'

The old man took his blue bonnet, which hung on the back of

his chair. 'Stand back, sir,' he said sternly to Andrew, who had risen to go to the door; 'if my hoose is mine nae mair, nor my bairn mine nae mair, it's me, at least, that has the richt to open, and nae ither man.' He put his bonnet on his head, pulling it down upon his brows. 'My head's white and my heart's sair: if the laird thinks I've nae mainners, he maun just put up wi't, I'm no' lang for this life that I should care.' He threw the door wide open as he spoke, meeting the look of the newcomers with his head down, and his shaggy eyebrows half covering his eyes. 'Gang in, gang in, if ye've business,' he said, and flung heavily past them, without further greeting. The sound of his heavy footstep, hastening away, filled all the silence which, for a moment, no one broke.

Norman made way, and almost pushed the Colonel in before before him. 'They expect you,' he said. And Colonel Hayward stepped in. *A more embarrassed man, or one more incapable of filling so difficult a position, could not be.* How willingly would he have followed Peter! But duty and necessity and Norman Bellendean all kept him up to the mark. Joyce stood straight up before him in front of the window. She turned to him her pale face, her eyes heavy with tears. The good man was accustomed to be received with pleasure, to dispense kindness wherever he went: to appear thus, in the aspect of a destroyer of domestic happiness, was more painful and confusing than words can say.

'Young lady,' he began, and stopped, growing more confused than ever. Then, desperation giving him courage, 'Joyce—— It cannot be stranger to you than it is to me, to see you standing here before me, my daughter, when I never knew I had a daughter. My dear, we ought to love one another,—but how can we, being such strangers? I have never been used to—anything of the kind. It's a great shock to us both, finding this out. But if you'll trust yourself to me, I'll—I'll do my best. A man cannot say more.'

'Sir,' said Joyce; her voice faltered and died away in her throat. She made an effort and began again, 'Sir,' then broke down altogether, and, making a step backwards, clutched at old Janet's dress. 'Oh, granny, he's very kind—his face is very kind,' she cried.

'Ay,' said the old woman, 'ye say true; he has a real kind face. Sir, what she wants to tell ye is, that though a's strange, and it's hard, hard to ken what to say, she'll be a good daughter to ye, and do her duty, though maybe there's mony things that may gang wrang at first. Ye see she's had naebody but Peter

and me : and she's real fond of the twa auld folk, and has been the best bairn'—Janet's voice shook a little, but she controlled it. 'Never, never in this world was there a better bairn—though she's aye had the nature o' a lady and the mainners o' ane, and might have thought shame of us puir country bodies. Na, my bonnie woman, na,—I ken ye never did. But, sir, ye need never fear to haud up yer head when ye've HER by your side. She's fit to stand before kings—ay, that she is,—before kings, and no before meaner men.'

The Colonel gazed curiously at the little old woman, who stood so firm in her self-abnegation that he, at least, never realised how sadly it went against the grain. 'Madam,' he said, in his old-fashioned way, 'I believe you fully; but it must be all to your credit and the way you have brought her up, that I find her what she is.' He took Janet's hand and held it in his own,—a hard little hand, scored and bony with work, worn with age—not lovely in any way. The Colonel recovered himself and regained his composure, now that he had come to the point at which he could pay compliments and give pleasure. 'I thank you, madam, from the bottom of my heart, for what you have done for her, and for what you are giving up to me,' he said, bowing low. Janet had no understanding of what he meant; and when he bent his grizzled moustache to kiss her hand, she gave a little shriek of mingled consternation and pleasure. 'Eh, Colonel!' she exclaimed, her old cheeks tingling with a blush that would not have shamed a girl's. Never in her life had lips of man touched Janet's hand before. She drew it from him and fell back upon her chair and sobbed, looking at the knotted fingers and prominent veins in an ecstasy of wonder and admiration. 'Did you see that, Joyce? he's kissed my hand; did ever mortal see the like? Eh, Colonel! I just havena a word—no' a word—to say.'

Joyce put out both her hands to her father, her eyes swimming in tears, her face lighted up with that sudden gleam of instantaneous perception which was one of the charms of her face. 'Oh, sir!' she said: the other word, father, fluttered on her lips. It was a gentleman who did that, one of the species which Joyce knew so little, but only that she belonged to it. In her quick imagination rehearsing every incident before it happened, that was what she would have had him do. The little act of personal homage was more than words, more than deeds, and changed the current of her feelings as by magic. And the Colonel now was in his element too. The tender flattery and sincere extravagance of all those delicate ways of giving pleasure were easy and natural

to him, and he was restored to himself. He took Joyce's hands in one of his, and drew her within his arm.

'My dear,' he said, with moisture in his eyes, 'you are very like your mother. God forgive me if I ever frightened her or neglected her! I could not look you in the face if I had ever done her conscious wrong. Will you kiss me, my child, and forgive your father? She would bid you do so if she were here.'

It was very strange to Joyce. She grew crimson, as old Janet had done, under her father's kiss. He was her father; her heart no longer made any objections; it beat high with a strange mixture of elation and pain. Her father—who had done her mother no conscious wrong, who had proved himself, in that high fantastical way which alone is satisfactory to the visionary soul, to be such a gentleman as she had always longed to meet with: yet one whom she would have to follow, far from all she knew, and, what was far worse, leaving desolate the old parents who depended upon her for all the brightness in their life. Her other sensations of pain fled away like clouds before the dawn, but this tragic strain remained. How would they do without her?—how could they bear the separation? The causeless resentment, the fanciful resistance which Joyce had felt against her father, vanished in a moment, having no cause; but the other burden remained.

Meanwhile there was another burden of which she had not thought. Andrew Halliday had discreetly withdrawn himself while the main action of the scene was going on. He stepped aside, and began to talk to Captain Bellendean. It was not undesirable in any circumstances to make friends with Captain Bellendean; and the schoolmaster had all his wits about him. He took up a position aside, where he could still command a perfect view of what was going on, and then he said, 'We are having very good weather for this time of the year.'

'Yes,' Norman said, a little surprised, 'I think so. It is not very warm, but it is always fine.'

'Not warm! That will be your Indian experiences, Captain; for we all think here it is a very fine season—the best we have had for years. The corn is looking well, and the farmers are content, which is a thing that does not happen every year.'

'No, indeed,' said Norman. He was not very much interested in the farmers, who had not yet begun to be the troublesome members of society they now are; but he did not wish to have his attention distracted from the scene going on so near; and but for innate civility, he would willingly have snubbed the school-

master. Andrew, however, was not a person to be suppressed so.

'You are more interested,' he said confidentially, 'in what's going on here; and so am I, Captain Bellendean. I have reason to be very deeply interested. Everything that concerns my dear Joyce——'

'Your dear—what?' cried the Captain abruptly, turning quickly upon him with an indignant air. Then, however, Captain Bellendean recollected himself. 'I beg your pardon,' he said quickly; 'I believe I have heard—something.'

'You will have heard,' said Halliday, 'that we've been engaged for some time back. We should have been married before now but for some difficulties about—about her parents and mine. Not that there was not perfect satisfaction with the connection,' he added, with his air of importance, 'on both sides of the house.'

'Oh,' said Norman. He felt himself grow red with annoyance at this intrusive fellow, whose affairs were nothing to him. He added with conscious sarcasm, 'Let us hope it will always continue to be equally satisfactory.'

'I hope so,' said Halliday. 'It could scarcely, indeed, be otherwise, seeing that Joyce was my choice in very humble circumstances, when I might well have found a partner in a different sphere. My mother's first word was, "Andrew, you might have done better;" but Joyce's own merits turned the scale. She is an excellent creature, Captain Bellendean, admirable in tuition. She raises an enthusiasm in the children, especially the bigger girls, which really requires quite a gift. I looked forward to the day when she should be transferred to my own parish, and work under me. Judicious guidance was all she required—just a hint here, a suggestion there—and there would not be a head-mistress in Scotland to equal her.'

'I fear,' said Norman, smoothing his annoyance into a laugh, 'that Colonel Hayward will put a stop to schoolmistressing.'

'Why, sir, why? it's a noble office. There could not be a finer occupation, nor one in which you can serve your country better. Ladies, indeed, after marriage, when they get the cares of a family, sometimes begin to flag a little,' said Halliday, giving a complacent look at Joyce. 'Of course,' he added, after a pause—and, though he did not know it, he had never been so near being kicked out of a house in his life—if Colonel Hayward should wish her to settle near him, there are many fine appointments to be had in England. I would not say that I should insist upon remaining here.'

'That would be kind,' said Captain Bellendean, with a sarcasm which was scarcely intentional. He was confounded by the composure and by the assurance of this fellow, who was so calmly persuaded of his own property in Joyce.

'I would think it only duty,' said Halliday; 'but you'll excuse me, Captain,—I think I am wanted.' He turled with a smile towards Joyce, still awed and astonished by the sudden change in her own sentiments, who continued to stand shy and tremulous within her father's encircling arm.

'Joyce,' said Andrew, 'I am glad to see this happy conclusion; but you have not yet introduced me to the Cornel—and we can have no secrets from him now.'

The Colonel turned with astonishment and something as like *hauteur* as was possible to his gentle and courteous temper, to the new speaker. He looked him over from head to foot, with a dim recollection of having seen him before, and of having somehow resented his appearance even then. He resented it much more now, when this half-bred person, whose outside was not that of a gentleman, yet was not that of a labouring man, came forward claiming a place between his daughter and himself. He turned upon Andrew that mild lightning of indignant eyes which had proved so efficacious in the regiment. But Halliday was not to be intimidated by any man's eyes. He drew still nearer with an ingratiating smile, and said again, 'Introduce me to the Cornel, Joyce.'

Joyce had accepted Andrew Halliday's love—as little of it as possible: because he had forced it upon her, because his talk and acquaintance with books had dazzled her, because she had found a certain protection in him from other rustic suitors. She had allowed it to be understood that some time or other she would marry him. He was the nearest to herself in position, in ambition, of any in the country-side. But she lifted her eyes to him now with a shrinking and horror which she herself could not understand. He stood between her and Captain Bellendean, contrasting himself without the smallest reluctance or sense of danger with the man whose outward semblance was more like that of a hero than any man Joyce had seen. She made in a moment the comparison which it had never occurred to Halliday to make. His under-size, his imperfect development, the absence of natural grace and refinement in him, made themselves apparent to her sharply, as if by the sting of a sudden blow. She gazed at him, the colour again flushing over her face, with a slight start of surprise and something like repugnance. He had got her promise that she would marry

him, but she had never promised to present him to her unknown dream-father as his future son.

'Who is it?' said Colonel Hayward. He curved his eyebrows over his eyes to assist his vision, which gave him a look of displeasure; and he was displeased to see this man,—a man with whom he had some previous unpleasant association, he could not tell what,—thrusting himself in at such an inappropriate moment between his daughter and himself.

'It is—Andrew Halliday,' said Joyce, very low, turning her head away. Halliday held his ground very sturdily, and acknowledged this abrupt description with an ingratiating smile.

'How do you do, Cornet?' he said. 'After all, she's shy—she leaves me to introduce myself; which is not perhaps to be wondered at. We have been engaged for nearly a year. I came here to-day, knowing nothing, to try and persuade her to name the day, and put an end to a wretched bachelor's life. But when I arrived I found everything turned upside down, and Joyce quite past giving any heed to me. I hope I may leave my cause in your hand, Cornet,' said the schoolmaster, with the utmost absence of perception. He thought he had made a very agreeable impression, and that his affairs were, as he said, safe in the Cornet's hands.

'You are engaged to this—gentleman?' Colonel Hayward said.

Joyce felt herself quail as she looked into her father's face. She read all that was in his at a glance. Colonel Hayward was quite ignorant of Halliday, quite unaccustomed to the kind of man, unprepared for this new claim; and yet his eyes expressed the same thoughts which were in hers. A little shiver of keen sympathetic feeling ran through her. She felt herself unable to say anything. She assented with a look in which, with horror at herself, she felt the shrinking, the reluctance to acknowledge the truth, the disinclination which she had never allowed even to herself up to this time. The Colonel looked from Joyce, standing with downcast eyes and that half-visible shrinking in every line of her figure and attitude, to the commonplace man with the smirk on his countenance: and breathed once more the habitual aspiration of his life, 'Oh that Elizabeth were here!' But then he remembered that Elizabeth had sent him away to work it out for himself.

'We always knew,' said Halliday, 'that this day would come some time, and that her real origin would be known. I have looked forward to it, Cornet. I have always done my best to help her to prepare—for any position. I am not rich,' he added, with demonstrative frankness; 'but among people of high tone that's

but a secondary matter, and I know you'll find we are true partners and mates, Joyce and myself, in every other way.'

'Sir, I am very much confused with one discovery,' said the Colonel, hesitating and tremulous. 'I—I—can scarcely realise yet about my daughter. Let the other stand over a little—let it wait a little—till I have got accustomed—till I know how things are—till I——'

He looked at Joyce anxiously to help him out. But for the first time in her life Joyce failed in this emergency. She stood with her eyes cast down, slightly drawn back, keeping herself isolated by an instinctive movement. She had never been in such a strait before.

'Oh,' said Halliday, 'I understand. I can enter into your feelings, Cornel; and I am not afraid to wait.' He took Joyce's hand, which hung by her side, and clasped it close. 'Joyce,' he said, 'will speak for me; Joyce will see that I am not put off too long.'

A sudden heat like a flame seemed to envelop Joyce. She withdrew her hand quickly, yet almost stealthily, and turned upon her father—her father whom she had known only for a few hours, whose claims she had at first rejected—an appealing look. Then Joyce, too, remembered herself. Truth and honour stood by Halliday's side, though he was not of their noble strain. The flame grew hotter and hotter, enveloping her, scorching her, turning from red to the white flames of devouring fire. She turned back to her betrothed lover, scarcely seeing through eyes dazzled by that glare, and put out her hand to him as if forced by some invisible power.

CHAPTER XVI

THE little family party left Bellendean two days after. It was not expedient, they all felt, to linger long over the inevitable separation. Even old Janet was of this mind. 'If it were done when 'tis done, then it were well it were done quickly.' The sentiment of these words was in the old woman's mind, though possibly she did not know them. Joyce was finally taken from her foster-parents when she left them for Bellendean on the evening before, half heart-broken, yet half ecstatic, not knowing how to subdue the extraordinary emotion and excitement that tingled to her very finger-points. She was going to dine at the table which represented everything that was splendid and refined to the village schoolmistress, to be waited on by the servants who thought themselves much superior to old Peter and Janet, to hear the talk, to make acquaintance with the habits of those whom she had looked up to all her life. The Bellendean carriage came for her, to bring her away not only from the cottage, but from all her past existence—from everything she had known. By Janet's advice, or rather commands, Joyce had put on her one white dress, the soft muslin gown which she had sometimes worn on a summer Sunday, and in which the old people had always thought she looked like a princess. Peter sat by the open door of the cottage while these last preparations were being made. The anger of great wretchedness was blazing in the old man's eyes. 'What are you doing with that white dud?' he said, giving her a glance askance out of his red eyes. 'I aye said it was not fit for a decent lass out of my house. Mak' her pit on a goon that's like her place, no like thae light-headed limmers.' He waved his hand towards the east end of the village, where there lived an ambitious family with fine daughters. 'Dod! I would tear it off her back.'

'Haud your tongue,' said his wife; 'what good will it do you to fecht and warstle with Providence? The time's come when we

maun just submit. Na, na, never heed him, Joyce. The white's far the best. And just you step into your carriage, my bonnie lady: it's the way I've aye seen you going aff in my dreams. Peter, dinna sit there like a sulky bear. Give her a kiss and your blessing, and let her go.'

A laugh of hoarse derision burst from Peter's lips. 'I'm a bonnie man to kiss a grand lady! I never was ane for thae showings-off. If she maun go, she will hae to go, and there is an end o't. Farewell to ye, Joyce!'

He got up hastily from his seat at the door. The footman outside and the coachman on the box, keenly observant both, looked on—and Peter knew their fathers and mothers, and was aware that any word he said would be public property next day. He gave himself a shake, and pulled his bonnet over his eyes, but did not stride away as he had done before. He stood leaning his back against the wall, his face half buried in the old coat-collar which rose to his ears when he bent his head, and in the shadow of his bonnet and the forest of his beard. It was Janet, in her quavering voice, who gave the blessing, putting up two hard hands, and drawing them over Joyce's brown satin hair and soft cheeks: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord lift up the light o' His countenance upon thee." Gang away, gang away! It will maybe no' be sae hard when you're out o' our sight.'

The horses seemed to make but one bound, the air to fill with the sound of hoofs and wheels, and Joyce found herself beginning again to perceive the daylight through her blinding tears. And her heart, too, gave a bound, involuntary, unwilling. It was not so hard when they were out of sight, and the new world so full of expectation, of curiosity, of the unknown, opened before her in a minute. Joyce in her white dress, in the Bellendean carriage driving up the avenue to dinner, with her father waiting at the other end to receive her, was and could be Joyce Matheson no more. All that she knew and was familiar with departed from her like the rolling up of a map, like the visions of a dream.

There was, however, so much consciousness, so much curiosity, so many comments made upon Joyce and her story, that the strange witching scene of the dinner-table—a thing of enchantment to the girl, with its wonderful flowers and fine company—was for the other guests somewhat embarrassing and uncomfortable. Strangely enough Joyce was almost the only one at table who was unaffected by this feeling. To her there was something symbolical in the novelty which fitted in with all her dreams and hopes. The flowers, the pretty dresses, the glitter and show of the white table

with its silver and porcelain, the conversation, a dozen different threads going on at once, the aspect of the smiling faces as they turned to each other,—all carried out her expectations. It seemed to Joyce, sitting almost silent, full of the keenest observation, that the meal, the vulgar eating and drinking, was so small a part of it. She could not hear what everybody was saying, nor was she, in the excitement and confusion of her mind, very capable of understanding the rapid interchange of words, so many people talking together; but it represented to her the feast of reason and the flow of soul better than the most brilliant company in the world, more distinctly heard and understood, could have done. She was not disappointed. Joyce knew by the novels she had read that in such circumstances as hers the newcomer full of expectation generally was disappointed, and found that, seen close, the finest company was no better than the humblest. Her imagination had rebelled against that discomfiting discovery even when she read of it; and now it was with great elation that she felt she had been right all through and the novels wrong. She was not disappointed. The food and the eating were quite secondary, as they ought to be. When she looked along the table, it was to see smiling faces raised in pleasure at something that had been said, or saying something with the little triumphant air of successful argument or happy wit, or listening with grave attention, assenting, objecting, as the case might be. She did not know what they were saying, but she was convinced that it was all beautiful, clever, witty, true conversation, the food for which her spirit had hungered. She had no desire for the moment to enter into it herself. She was dazzled by all the prettiness and brightness, moved to the heart by that sensation of having found what she longed for, and at last obtained entrance into the world to which she truly belonged. She smiled when she met Mrs. Bellendean's eye, and answered slightly at random when she was spoken to. She was by her father's side, and he did not speak to her much. She was kindly left with her impressions, to accustom herself gradually to the new scene. And she was entirely satisfied, elated, afloat in an ethereal atmosphere of contentment and pleasure. Her dreams, she thought, were all realised.

But next morning the old life came back with more force than ever. Joyce went over and over the scene of the evening. 'Gang away, gang away! It will maybe no' be sae hard when you're out o' our sight.' Her foster-parents had thrust her from them, not meaning to see her again; and though her heart was all aching and bleeding, she did not know what to do, whether to attempt a

second parting, whether to be content that the worst was over. She made the compromise which tender-hearted people are so apt to do. She got up very early, following her old habit with a curious sense of its unusualness and unnecessariness—to use two awkward words—and ran down all the way to the village through the dewy grass. But early as she was, she was not early enough for Peter, whom she saw in the distance striding along with his long, heavy tread, his head bowed, his bonnet drawn over his brows, a something of dreary *abandon* about him which went to Joyce's heart. He was going through a field of corn which was already high, and left his head and shoulders alone visible as he trudged away to his work—the sun beating upon the rugged head under its broad blue bonnet, the heavy old shoulders slouched, the long step undulating, making his figure fall and rise almost like a ship at sea. The corn was 'in the flower,' still green, and rustled in the morning air; a few red poppies blazed like a fringe among the sparse stalks near the pathway; the sky was very clear in the grey blue of northern skies under summer heat; but the old man, she was sure, saw nothing as he jogged onward heavy-hearted. Joyce dared not call to him, dared not follow him. With a natural pang she stood and watched the old father bereaved going out to his work. Perhaps it would console him a little: she for whom he sorrowed could do so no more.

But Joyce had not the same awe of Janet. Is it perhaps that there is even in the anguish of the affections a certain luxury for a woman which is not for the man? She ran along the vacant sunny village street, and pushed open the half-closed door, and flung herself upon the old woman's neck, who received her with a shriek of joy. Perhaps it crossed Janet's mind for a moment that her child had come back, that she had discovered already that all these fine folk were not to be lippened to; but the feeling, though ecstatic, was but momentary, and would indeed have been sternly opposed by her own better sense had it been true.

'Eh, and it's you!' she cried, seizing Joyce by the shoulders, gazing into her face.

'It is me, granny. For all you said last night that I was better out of your sight, I could not. I could not go—without seeing you again.'

'Did I say that?—the Lord forgive me! But it's just true. I'll be better when you're clean gane; but eh! I am glad, glad. Joyce—my bonnie woman, did ye see him?'

'Oh, granny, I saw him going across the big cornfield. Tell him I stood and watched him with his head down on his breast—

but I daredna lift my voice. Tell him Joyce will never forget—the green corn and the hot sun, and him—alone.’

‘What would hinder him to be his lane at six o’clock in the morning?’ said Janet, with a tearful smile. ‘You never gaed wi’ him to his work, ye foolish bairn. If he had left ye sleeping sound in your wee garret, would he have been less his lane? Ay, ay, I ken weel what you mean; I ken what you mean. Well, it just had to be; we maunna complain. Run away, my dawtie: run away, my bonnie lady—ye’ll write when ye get there; but though it’s a hard thing to say, it’ll be the best thing for us a’ when you’re just clean gane.’

Two or three hours afterwards, Joyce found herself, all the little confusion of the start over, seated in the seclusion of the railway carriage, with the father and mother who were henceforward to dispose of her life.

She had seen very little of them up to this moment. Colonel Hayward, indeed, had kept by her during the evening, patting her softly on her arm from time to time, taking her hand, looking at her with very tender eyes, listening, when she opened her mouth at rare intervals, with the kind of pleased, half-alarmed look with which an anxious parent listens to the utterances of a child. He was very, very kind—more than kind. Joyce had become aware, she could scarcely tell how, that the other people sometimes smiled a little at the Colonel—a discovery which awoke the profoundest indignation in her mind; but she already began half to perceive his little uncertainties, his difficulty in forming his own opinion, the curious helplessness which made it apparent that this distinguished soldier required to be taken care of, and more or less guided in the way he had to go. But she had done nothing towards making acquaintance with Mrs. Hayward, whose relation to her was so much less distinct, and upon whom so much of her comfort must depend. This lady sat in the corner of the carriage next the window, with her back to the engine, very square and firm—a far more difficult study for her new companion than her husband was. She had not shown by look or word any hostility towards Joyce; but still a sentiment of antagonism had, in some subtle way, risen between them. With the exclusiveness common to English travellers, they had secured the compartment in which they sat for themselves alone; so that the three were here shut up for the day in the very closest contact, to shake together as they might. Joyce sat exactly opposite to her step-mother, whilst the Colonel, who had brought in with him a sheaf of newspapers, changed about from side to side as the view, or the locomotion, or his own

restlessness required. He distributed his papers to all the party, thrusting a *Graphic* into Joyce's hands, and heaping the remainder upon the seat. Mrs. Hayward took up the *Scotsman* which he had given her, and looked at it contemptuously. 'What is it?' she said, holding it between her finger and her thumb. 'You know I don't care for anything, Henry, but the *Times* or the *Morning Post*.'

'You can have yesterday's *Times*, my dear,' said the Colonel; 'but you know we are four hundred miles from London. We must be content with the papers of the place. There are all the telegrams just the same—and very clever articles, I hear.'

'Oh, I don't want to read Scotch articles,' said Mrs. Hayward. She meant no harm. She was a little out of temper, out of heart. To say something sharp was a kind of relief to her; she did not think it would hurt any one, nor did she mean to do so. But Joyce grew red behind her *Graphic*. She looked at the pictures with eyes which were hot and dry with the great desire she had to shed the tears which seemed to be gathering in them. Now that Bellendean was left behind like a dream, now that the familiar fields were all out of sight, the village roofs disappeared for ever, and she, Joyce, not Joyce any longer, nor anything she knew, shut up here as in a strait little house with the people,—the people to whom she belonged,—a wild and secret anguish took possession of her. She sat quite still with the paper held before her face, trying to restrain and subdue herself. She felt that if the train would but stop, she would dart out and fly and lose herself in the crowd; and then she thought, with what seemed to her a new comprehension, of her mother who had done so—who had fled and been lost. Her poor young mother, a girl like herself! This thought, however, calmed Joyce; for if her mother had but been patient, the misery she was at present enduring need never have been. Had the first Joyce but subdued herself and restrained her hasty impulses, the second Joyce might have been a happy daughter, knowing her father and loving him, instead of the unhappy, uneasy creature she was, with her heart and her life torn in two. She paused with a kind of awe when that thought came into her mind. Her mother had entailed upon her the penalty of her hastiness, of her impatience and passion. She had paid the cost herself, but not all the cost—she had left the rest to be borne by her child. The costs of every foolish thing have to be borne, Joyce said to herself. Some one must drink out that cup to the dregs; it cannot pass away until it has been emptied by one or another. No; however tempting the crowd might be in which

she could disappear, however many the stations at which she could escape, she would not take that step. She would not postpone the pang. She would bear it now, however it hurt her; for one time or another it would have to be borne.

The conversation went on all the same, as if none of these thoughts were passing through the troubled brain of Joyce,—and she was conscious of it, acutely yet dully, 'as if it had been written upon the paper which she held before her face.

'You must not speak in that tone, my dear, of Scotch articles—before Joyce,' the Colonel said. 'I have never found that they liked it, however philosophical they might be——'

'Does Joyce count herself Scotch?' Mrs. Hayward asked, as if speaking from a distance.

'Do you hear your mother, my dear, asking if you call yourself Scotch?' he said.

Both Joyce and Mrs. Hayward winced at the name. There was nothing to call for its use, and neither of them intended to pick it up out of the oblivion of the past, or the still more effectual mystery of the might have been, to force it into their lives. But Joyce could not take notice of it: she could only reply to his question with a little exaggerated warmth—'I have never been out of Scotland, and all I care for has been always there. How could call myself anything else?'

It was not very long since Peter had accused her of 'standing up for the English.' That had been partially true, and so was this. She thought of it with almost a laugh of ridicule at herself. Now she felt Scotch to the tips of her fingers, resenting everything that was said or hinted against her foster-country.

'I see I must mind my p's and q's,' said Mrs. Hayward; 'but, fortunately, there will be no means of getting the *Scotsman* in Richmond, so we shall be exempt from that.'

There was something in Mrs. Hayward's tone which seemed to imply that other subjects of quarrel would not be wanting, and there was a little smile on her lips which gave further meaning to what she said, or seemed to do so; though, as a matter of fact, poor Mrs. Hayward had no meaning at all, but could not, though she tried, get rid of that little bit of temper which had sprung up all lively and keen at sight of the Colonel's solicitude about his daughter and her 'things'—a solicitude which was quite new and unaccustomed, for he was not in the habit of thinking of any one's 'things,' but rather, whenever he could, of losing his own. Among Joyce's small baggage there was one little shabby old-fashioned box—a box which Mrs. Hay-

ward divined at the first glance must contain the little relics of the mother, of itself a pitiful little object enough. There had not been a word said on the subject, but the Colonel had been startled by the sight of it. He had recognised it, or imagined that he recognised it, she said to herself severely, and had himself seen it put in the van, with a care which he had never taken for anything of hers. It was only a trifle, but it touched one of those chords that are ready to jar in the wayward human instrument of which the best of men and women have so little control. She could not get that jarring chord to be still; it vibrated all through her, giving an acrid tone to her voice, and something disagreeable to the smile that came, she could not tell how, to her lip. All these vibrations were hateful to her, as well as to the hapless antagonist who noted and divined them with quick responding indignation. But Mrs. Hayward could not help it, any more than she could help Joyce perceiving it. The close vicinity into which this little prison of a railway carriage brought them, so that not a tone or a look could be missed, was intolerable to the elder woman too. But she knew very well that she could not run away.

CHAPTER XVII

COLONEL HAYWARD's house was at Richmond, in one of the most beautiful spots that could be imagined. It stood on the slope of the hill, and commanded a view of the winding of the river upward towards Twickenham: and the grounds about it were exquisite, stretching down to the Thames, with a long if somewhat narrow sweep of lawn descending to the very water's edge. Nothing could be more warm and sheltered, more perfect in greenness and shade, nothing more bright and sunny than the combination of fine trees and blossoming undergrowth and elastic velvet turf, the turf of age, which had been dressed and tended like a child from before the memory of man, and never put to any rude use. The perfection of the place was in this lawn and the gardens and grounds, which were the Colonel's hobby, and to which he gave all his attention. But the house was also a very pretty house.

It was not large, and it was rather low: a verandah, almost invisible under the weight of climbing roses, clematis, honeysuckle, and every kind of flowering thing, went round the front; and here, looking over the river, were the summer quarters of the family. Wicker-chairs, some of Indian origin, little tables of all convenient kinds, Indian rugs in all their subdued wealth of colour, like moss under the feet, made this open-air apartment delightful. It combined two kinds of luxury with the daintiest yet most simple success. If there was a drawback it was only in bad weather, when the pretty drawing-room behind was by reason of this verandah a little wanting in light; but no one could think of that in the June weather, when the sunshine touched everything with pleasantness.

Mrs. Hayward was as proud of the house as the Colonel was of the garden. After India it cannot be described how delightful it was to them, both very insular people, to get back to the greenness and comfort of this English home; and they both watched for the

effect it would have upon Joyce, with highly raised expectations. To bring a girl out of a Scotch cottage to such a place as this, to open to her all at once, from Peter Matheson's kitchen, in which the broth was made and the oatcakes baked, the glories of that drawing-room, which Mrs. Hayward could scarcely leave to be tended by a mere housemaid, which she herself pervaded every morning, giving loving touches everywhere, arranging draperies, altering the positions of the furniture, laying out those lovely pieces of oriental stuff and Indian embroideries which, always put carefully away at night, adorned the sofas and chairs. Though she did not love 'the girl' she yet looked forward to the moment when all this splendour should dawn upon Joyce, with a feeling half sympathetic, realising the awe and admiration with which for the first time her untutored eyes must contemplate the beautiful room, and all the luxury of the place, which to her must look like splendour. Mrs. Hayward did not pretend that it was splendid—'our little place,' she called it, with proud humility; but she knew that it was more perfect than anything about, and in itself without comparison, a sight to see. That Joyce would be dazzled, almost overwhelmed, by her sudden introduction into such a home, she had no manner of doubt. And this anticipation softened her, and gave her a certain interest in Joyce. She talked to her husband at night, after their arrival, about his daughter in a more friendly tone than she had yet employed.

'I thought of giving her the little west room for herself. She will want a place to herself to be untidy in—all girls do: a place where she can keep her work—if she works—or her books: or—whatever she is fond of.' Mrs. Hayward had a distinct vision in her eye of a little old-fashioned box—the ark of the relics which the Colonel had recognised—and made up her mind that it should be at once endued with a chintz cover, so that it might be recognisable no more.

'There is nobody like you, Elizabeth, for kind thoughts,' he said gratefully. Then with the same expectation that had softened her, he went on—'She has never been used to anything of the kind. I shouldn't wonder if it was too much for her feelings—for she feels strongly, or else I am mistaken; and she is a girl who—if you once bind her to you by love and kindness——' The Colonel's own voice quivered a little. He was himself touched by that thought.

'Don't speak nonsense, Henry—we know nothing about the girl, neither you nor I. The thing in her favour is, that all those Scotch friends of yours thought very well of her: but then the

Scotch stick to each other so—— She has a spirit—and a temper too, I shouldn't wonder.'

'No, my dear, it was only a flash, because she thought—because she was taken by surprise.'

'I think none the worse of her for having a little temper; I have one myself,' said Mrs. Hayward with candour. 'People like that are far safer than the sweet yielding ones who show nothing. And another thing—we shall have to account for her. I don't know if you have thought of that.'

'Account for her?'

'Yes, to be sure. People will be calling—and they will wonder how it was they never heard of your daughter before. One of the hardest things in life is, that whenever you are in any society you must explain. That was one advantage of being in none.'

'I never liked it, Elizabeth. I always thought you were too particular—as the event has proved, my dear, as the event has proved!'

Mrs. Hayward withdrew a little from him and his congratulations. Now that her position was beyond question, she was unwilling in her impatient soul that any reference should be made to the doubt which had shadowed her life before. That was all over. She would have had it forgotten for ever, and in her heart resented his recollection of it. She resumed the previous subject without taking any notice of this.

'Fortunately, we don't know the people here so well that we need go into it from the beginning and tell everything. I have been thinking it over, and this is what I shall say—I shall say, Your daughter has been brought up by some old relations in Scotland, but that we both felt it was time she should come home. If they say, "O! we did not know Colonel Hayward had any family," I shall answer, "Did I never tell you?" as if it had been quite an accidental oversight. Now don't go and contradict me, Henry, and say more than there is any occasion for. Let us both be in one tale.'

'My dear,' he said, 'to think that you should have settled all that while I was thinking about nothing; but why should we be in a tale at all? Why shouldn't I just say simply——'

'It is such a simple story, isn't it?' she cried, 'that you should have had a child—an only child, as you said in Bellendean——'

There was a tone of exasperation in this which made Colonel Hayward look up. He said, 'But it was quite true, Elizabeth. Providence has not thought meet to give us——'

'As if I did not know that!' cried the woman whom Provi-

dence—that synonym of all that goes against the wishes of humanity—had not permitted to be a mother. ‘But,’ she added quickly, taking up the thread again, ‘you will see, if you think of it, that we can’t go into all that story. There would be so much to explain. And besides, it’s nobody’s business.’

‘Then why say anything at all, my dear?’ the Colonel said.

‘Why know anybody at all, you mean? As if we could avoid explaining a thing which is a very strange thing, however you take it! Unless you have anything better to suggest, that is what I shall say. Brought up by some old relations in Scotland—you can say her mother’s relations if you please; but that we felt it was not right to leave her there any longer, now we are quite settled and she is grown up. Don’t contradict me just when I am in the middle of my story, Henry. Back me up about the relations—unless you have anything better to suggest.’

Colonel Hayward, however, had nothing to suggest, though he was much embarrassed by having a story to tell. ‘I’ll forget what it is you want me to say—or I’ll go too far—or I’ll—make a muddle of it one way or other,’ he said. ‘I shall feel as if there was something wrong about it, Elizabeth: and there is nothing wrong—nothing, nothing! all the time.’

‘Go to bed,’ said Mrs. Hayward; ‘you are too tired to begin to think at this hour. You know the railway always upsets you. Go to bed, my dear—go to bed.’

‘Well, perhaps it will be the best thing,’ the Colonel said.

They both got up next morning with one pleasant thought in their minds, that of dazzling Joyce. It took away the line even from Mrs. Hayward’s brow. It was pleasant to anticipate the astonishment, the admiration, the deep impression which all these unaccustomed splendours would make. Poor girl! it would be almost too much for her; and they both wondered what she would say—whether she would break down altogether in amazement and rapture—whether it would be by words or tears that she would show her sense of this wonderful change in her life.

Alas! Joyce had awoke with a pang of disappointment almost as keen as that which seized her when she was first told that Colonel Hayward was her father. She woke in a pretty room all dainty and fresh, with pretty paper, pretty furniture, everything that was most suitable and becoming for the character and dimensions of the place; and she hurried to the window and looked out eagerly upon the pretty English lawn so trim and well cared for, the trees that formed two long lines down to the river, shutting it out from other enclosures on either side, the brilliant flower-beds

near the house, the clustering climbers that surrounded her window. And the cottage girl felt her high-vaulting thoughts go down, down, with a disappointment which made her giddy. Was ever anything so foolish, so wicked, so thankless? From the little garret in the cottage to this room filled with convenient and pretty things, of some of which she did not even understand the use—from the village street of Bellendean, seen through the open door or greenish bad glass of the cottage windows, to this warm luxurious landscape, and the silver Thames, and the noble trees! And yet Joyce was disappointed beyond what words could say.

She had no knowledge of this limited comfortable luxurious littleness; all that she knew was the cottage life—and Bellendean. There were, to be sure, the farmers' houses, and the manse; but neither of these types resembled this, nor was either consistent with the image of Colonel Hayward, the Captain's colonel, the 'distinguished soldier,' with whose name Joyce had begun to flatter herself everybody was acquainted. She stood half dressed and gazed out upon the long but confined stretch of lawn, and the low gable which was within sight from the window, with dismay. A chill struck to her heart. She thought of Bellendean, not half so daintily cared for as this little demesne, with its groups of great trees, its wide stretches of park, its careless size and greatness. Poor Joyce! had she been the minister's daughter at the manse, she might have been dazzled and delighted, as was expected from her. But she understood nothing of this. She knew the poor and their ways, and she knew the great people—the great houses and big parks, the cottages with a but and a ben and a little killyard. The one was all-familiar to her—the other was her ideal, the natural alternative of poverty: but this she knew nothing about—nothing at all.

She did not understand it. The toil and care which made that lawn like velvet, perfect, without a weed, elastic, springing under the foot, soft as moss, and green as constant waterings and mowings could make it, was totally lost upon Joyce. She saw the two lines of trees and flowering shrubs, elaborately masking all more arbitrary lines of limitation on each side, shutting it off—and the sight of those green bonds made her heart turn back upon herself. Her father had recovered in her mind the greatness necessary for her ideal: he was a distinguished soldier—what could be better? He was finer in his fame (she said to herself) than if he had been a prince or a duke. But his house! She retired from her window and covered her face with her hands, and went back into the secret citadel of herself with a dismayed heart.

She had never calculated upon this. To be just one among a crowd, to be nobody in particular, to have suffered this convulsion in her life and rending asunder of her being, for nothing—to be nobody. And all the time these two good people were forestalling each other in their anticipations, making pictures to themselves of Joyce's transport and delight!

How she got through the ordeal will be best seen in the long letters which she wrote that evening to her old home.

'My dearest old Granny, my own real true Mother—I wonder how you are, and how the day has passed, and how grandfather is, and even the cat, and everything at home. Oh what a thing it is to go away from your home, to be taken from the true place you belong to! You will never know how I felt when it all melted away into the sky, and Bellendean was a thing I could see no more. Oh my bonnie little Bellendean, where I've lived all my life, and the old ash-tree, and the rose-bushes, and my garret-window where I could see the Firth, and our kindly table where we ate our porridge and where I could see *you*! O Granny, my own Granny, that's all gone away into the skies, and the place that has known me knows me no more: and here I am in a strange place, and I cannot tell whether I'm Joyce still, or if I'm like the woman in the old song, "and this is no' me."

'Dear Granny, the journey was well enough: it was the best of all. I got a paper full of pictures (the *Graphic*, you know it), and they just talked their own talks, and did not ask me much: and then the country span along past the carriage-window, towns and castles, and rivers, and fields of corn, and all the people going about their business and knowing nothing at all of a poor lassie carried quick, quick away from her home. I pictured to myself that I might be going away for a governess to make some money for my grandfather and you—but that would not have been so bad, for I would have gone back again when I got the money: and then I tried to think I might be going to take care of somebody, perhaps a brother I might have had that was ill, and that you would be anxious at home—very anxious—but not like the present: for he would have begun to get better as soon as I was there to nurse him, and every day the time would have come nearer for taking him home. And I tried a great many other things, but none was bad enough—till I just came back to the truth, that here I was flying far away to a new life and a new name, and to try and be content and live with new people that I never saw, and leave all my own behind. Oh, Granny, I am ungrateful

to say this, for they're very good to me, and my father is kind and sweet and a real true gentleman: and would be that, as grandfather is, if he were a ploughman like grandfather: and what could you say more if you were Shakespeare's self and had all the words in the world at your command?

'We stopped in London, but I could not see at all what like it was, except just hundreds of railway lines all running into each other, and trains running this way and that way as if they were mad—but never any harm seemed to be done, so far as I could see: and then we took another train, and, after a little while, came here. To tell you about it is very difficult, for it is so different from anything that ever was before. Do you remember, Granny, the place where Argyle took Jeanie Deans after she had spoken to the Queen? where she said it would be fine feeding for the cows, and he just laughed—for it was the finest view and the most beautiful landscape, with the Thames running between green banks and big beautiful trees, and boats upon the river, and the woods all like billows of green leaves upon the brae? You will cry out when I tell you that this is *here*, and that the house is on that very brae, and that I'm looking out over the river, and see it running into the mist and the distance, going away north—or rather coming down from the north—where my heart can follow, but farther, farther away. And it is a very beautiful landscape: you never saw anything to compare to it; but oh, Granny, I never knew so well before what Sir Walter is and how he knew the hearts of men, for I'm always thinking what Jeanie said, "I like just as well to look at the craigs o' Arthur Seat, and the sea coming in ayont them." For me, I think of Bellendean and the Firth, and the hills drawing close round Queen Margaret's Hope; but chiefly because you are there, Granny, and all I care for most.

'I will tell you one thing: my father's house is not, as we were fond to think, like Bellendean. The houses here are not great houses like that. I think they wonder I am not an enthusiast, as Mrs. Bellendean always said I was, for the things they have here. All the poliey,¹ and everything in the house, is taken care of—as you used to take care of me. I can't think of any other image. They are always at them. Mrs. Hayward puts on the things upon the chairs and the tables with her own hands. The things I mean are pieces of beautiful silk, sometimes woven in flowers like Mrs. Bellendean's grandest gown, sometimes all worked with the needle as they do in India, fine, fine. I would like to

¹ Grounds of a country-house.

copy some of them : but what would be the use ? for they have them all from India itself, and what I did would be but an imitation. I am afraid to sit down upon the chairs for fear there should be some dust upon my gown, and I think I ought to take off my shoes before I go upon the carpet. You would like to go round and round as if you were in a collection, and look at everything. It will sometimes be ivory carving, and sometimes china that is very old and precious, and sometimes embroidery work, and sometimes silk with gold and silver woven in. And what you will laugh at, Granny, Mrs. Hayward has plates hung up instead of pictures—china plates like what you eat your dinner from, only painted in beautiful colours—and an ashet¹ she has which is blue, and very like what we have at home. All these things are very pretty—very pretty : but not to me like a room to live in. Of the three—this house, and Bellendean, and our own little housie at home—I would rather, of course, have Bellendean, I will not deny it, Granny ; but next I would rather have our own little place, with my table at the back window, and you aye moving about whatever there was to do. They are more natural ; but I try to look delighted with everything, for to Mrs. Hayward it is the apple of her eye.

‘She has never had any children.

‘My father is just as fond of his policy and his gardens—(but it’s too little for a policy, and it’s more than a garden). The gardeners are never done. They are mowing, or they are watering, or they are sweeping, or they are weeding, all the long day. And it’s all very bonnie—very bonnie—grass that is like velvet, and rose-bushes not like our roses at home, but upon a long stalk, what they call standards, and trees and flowers of kinds that I cannot name. I will find out about them and I will tell you after. But oh, Granny, the grand trees are like a hedge to a field ; they are separating us from the garden next door. It is very, very strange—you could not think how strange—to be in a fine place that is not a place at all, but just a house with houses next door—not like Bellendean, oh, not like Bellendean—and not like any kind of dwelling I have seen, so pretty and so well kept, and yet neither one thing nor another, not poor like us—oh, far from that!—and yet not great. I am praising it all, and saying everything I can think—and indeed it’s very pretty, far finer than anything I ever saw : but I think she sees that I am not doing it from my heart. I wish I could ; but oh, Granny dear, how can I think so much of any place that takes me away from my real home ?’

¹ Large oval dish.

‘My dear, dear love to my grandfather, and tell him I never forget his bowed head going through the corn, as I saw him last when he did not see me. To think his good grey head should be bowed because of Joyce, that never got anything but good from him and you, all her life ! Tell me what they are all saying, and who is to get the school, and if the minister was angry. What a good thing it was the vacation, and all the bairns away ! You must not be unhappy about me, Granny, for I will do my best, and you can’t be very miserable when you do that ; and perhaps I will get used to it in time.

‘Good night, and good night, and God be with us all, if not joy, as the song says.—Always your own and grandfather’s,

‘JOYCE.’

She wrote at the same time her first letter to Halliday, lingering with the pen in her hand as if unwilling to begin. She was a little excited by what she had just written, her outpouring of her heart to her foster-mother. And this was different. But at last she made the plunge. She dried her eyes, and gave herself a little shake together, as if to dismiss the lingering emotion, and began, ‘Dear Andrew’ ; but then came to another pause. What was in Joyce’s thoughts ? There was a spot of ink on the page, an innocent little blot. She removed the sheet hastily from the other paper, and thrust it below the leaves of her blotting-book. Then she took a steel pen, instead of the quill with which she had been hurrying along the other sheets—a good hard, unemotional piece of iron, which might make the clean and exact writing which the schoolmaster loved—and began again : and this time a little demure mischief was in Joyce’s eyes :—

‘DEAR ANDREW—We arrived here last night, tired but not worn out, and came home at once to my father’s house. The journey was very interesting—to see so many places I had heard of, even if they only flew past the carriage-windows. Of course it was the train that flew, and not Durham and Newcastle and all the rest. You have been to London yourself, so you will not require me to tell you all I saw, and I was thinking a great deal on what I left behind, so that I did not see them with an easy heart, so as to get the good of them, as you would do.

‘I wonder if you have ever seen Richmond—it is a beautiful place : the Thames a quiet river, not like any I know ; but I have seen so little. It is like a picture more than a river, and the trees all in waves of green, one line above another, rich and quiet,

with no wind to blow them about. I thought upon the poem, "As idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean:" though there is neither ship nor ocean, but only the stream that scarcely seems to flow, and the little boats that scarcely seem to move—everything so warm and so still. My father's house is called Rosebank, as you will see by the printing on the paper. It is rather a foolish name, but it was the name of the house before they came here. It is the most wonderful place I ever saw, so carefully kept and beautifully furnished. I never understood before what all the novels say now about furniture and the pretty things scattered about. There is a quantity of things in the drawing-room which I should have taken the children to an exhibition to see, and I should have had to read up a great deal to explain everything to them. But no one thinks of explaining: they are just lying about, and no one pays any attention to them here. My father takes a great interest in the gardens and the grounds, which are beautiful. And the best thing of all is the view of all the bits of the Thames, and the beautiful woods.

'It is a great change, and it makes one feel very unsteady at first, and I scarcely realise what the life will be, but I must trust that everything will turn out well: and my father and Mrs. Hayward are very kind. I am to have a sitting-room to myself to do what I like in, and I am to be taken about to see everything. You will not expect me to tell you much more at present, for I don't know much more, it being only the first day; but I thought you would like to hear at once. It is a great change. I wonder sometimes if I may not perhaps wake up to-morrow and find I am at home again and it is all a dream.

'I hope you will go and see Granny, when you can, and cheer them a little. Grandfather is glad of a crack, you know. They will be lonely at first, being always used to me. I will be very thankful to you, dear Andrew, if you will see them when you can, and be very kind—but that, I am sure, you will be. When I think of them sitting alone, and nobody to come in and make them smile, it just breaks my heart.—Yours affectionately,

'JOYCE HAYWARD.'

Joyce Hayward—it was the first time she had signed her name. Her eyes were too full thinking of the old people to see how it looked, but when that lump had melted a little in her throat, and she had dried her eyes, turning hastily aside that no drop might fall upon the fair page and blot the nice and careful writing, Joyce looked at it, and again there came upon her face a faint little smile.

Joyce Hayward—it did not look amiss. And it was a beautifully written letter, not a *t* but was crossed, not an *i* but was dotted. She had resisted all temptations to abridge the ‘affectionately.’ There it stood, fully written out in all its long syllables. That would please Andrew. When she had put up her letters, she rose from her seat and looked out once more, softly pushing aside the carefully drawn curtains, upon the landscape sleeping in the soft summer haze of starlight and night. All so still—no whisper of the sea near, no thrill of the north wind—a serene motionless stretch of lawn and river and shadowy trees. It was a lovely scene, but it saddened Joyce, who felt the soft dusk fill her soul and fold over all her life. And thus ended her first day in her father’s house.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOYCE was sadly uncertain what to do or how to behave herself in her new home. She took possession of the room which was given to her as a sitting-room, with a confused sense that she was meant to remain there, which was half a relief and half a trouble to her. To live there all alone except when she was called to meals was dreadfully dreary, although it felt almost a pleasure for the first moment to be alone. She brought out her writing things, which were of a very humble description, and better suited to the back window in the cottage than to the pretty writing-table upon which she now arranged them,—a large old blotting-book, distended with the many exercises and school-papers it had been accustomed to hold, and a shabby rosewood desk, which she had got several years ago as the prize of one of her examinations. How shabby they looked, quite out of place, unfit to be brought into this beautiful house! Joyce paused a moment to wonder whether she herself was as much out of place in her brown frock, which, though it was made like Greta's, and so simple and quiet that it could not be vulgar, was yet a dress very suitable for the schoolmistress. She brought down her few books, some of which were prizes too, and still more deplorable in their cheap gilding than the simply shabby ones. Nobody could say that the bindings were not vulgar, although it was *Milton*, and *Wordsworth*, and *Coleridge*, and the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* that were within. She made a row of them in the pretty bookshelves, and they looked like common people intruding into a fine house, as she herself was doing. Common people! Milton and Wordsworth! That showed how little was told by the outside; and Joyce was not without a proud consciousness swelling in her breast that she, too, in her brown frock, and with her village schoolmistress's traditions, was not common or unworthy.

Her father had met her coming downstairs with her arms full

of the books, and had stopped to take them from her with a shocked look, and insisted on carrying them down for her. 'But why didn't you ring for somebody to do it, my dear?' he said. 'They are not heavy,' said Joyce; 'they are no trouble,—and I always do things for myself.' 'But you must not here,' Colonel Hayward said, putting them down on the table, and pausing a moment to brush off with his handkerchief the little stains of dust which they had left on his irreproachable coat. Joyce felt that little movement with another keen sensation of inappropriateness. It was not right, because she was unaccustomed to being served by others, that Colonel Hayward, a distinguished soldier, should get specks of dust on his coat. A hot blush enveloped her like a flame, while she stood looking at him, not knowing whether to say anything, whether to try to express the distress and bewilderment that filled her being, or if it would be better to be silent and mutely avoid such an occurrence again.

He looked up at her when he had brushed away the last speck, and smiled. 'Books will gather dust,' he said. 'Don't look as if you were to blame, my dear. But you must remember, Joyce, you are the young lady of the house, and everything in it is at your command.' He patted her shoulder, with a very kind encouraging look, as he went away. It was a large assurance to give, and probably Mrs. Hayward would not have said quite so much; but it left Joyce in a state of indescribable emotion, her heart deeply touched, but her mind distracted with the impossibilities of her new position. How was she to know what to do? To avoid giving trouble, to save herself, was not the rule she could abide by when it ended in specking with dust the Colonel's coat, and bringing him out of his own occupations to help her. Joyce sat down when she had arranged her books, and tried to thread her way through all this maze which bewildered her. She had nothing to do, and she thought she was intended to spend her life here, to sit alone and occupy herself. It was very kindly meant, she was sure, so as to leave her at her ease; and she was glad to have this refuge, not to be always in Mrs. Hayward's way, sitting stiffly in the drawing-room waiting to be spoken to. Oh yes; she was glad to be here: yet she looked about the room with eyes a little forlorn.

It was a nice little room, with a large window looking out upon the flower-garden, and it was, so far as Joyce knew, very prettily furnished, but without the luxuries and decorations of the other rooms. There were no pictures, but a little standing frame or two on the mantelpiece, no doubt intended for those endless

photographs of friends which she had seen in Greta's room at Bellendean, always the first things taken out of her boxes when her belongings were unpacked. But Joyce had few friends. She had a little rude picture on glass, shut up in a little case, of old Peter and Janet, the old woman in her big bonnet and shawl, her husband, all one broad smile, looking over her shoulder—very dear to Joyce, but not to be exposed on the mantelpiece for Mrs. Hayward's quick look of criticism. Joyce felt that Greta in a moment would make that room her own. She would bring down her photographs; she would throw down her work, which never was done, with all the pretty silks about. She would spread out her paper and her pens, and the letters she had received and those she had begun to write, upon the table where Joyce's big old blotting-book lay, and the rosewood desk, closed and looking like an ugly oblong box as it was—long, bare, and miserable; but none of all these things could Joyce do. She had no work, and no photographs of her friends, and no letters, and nothing to do—nothing to do! And was this how she was to spend her life?

She sat there until the bell rang for lunch, saying to herself that it was far better than being in the drawing-room in Mrs. Hayward's way; and then she went timidly out into the hall, where her father was standing, just come in from some supervision in the garden. 'I have had a busy morning,' he said, beaming upon her, 'and so I suppose have you, my dear; but we'll soon settle down. Mrs. Hayward——' here he paused with a little uneasiness, and after a moment resumed—'your mother—has been very busy too. There is always a great deal to do after one has been away.'

'Considering that I was only away four days,' said Mrs. Hayward, coming in from the other side, and leading the way to the dining-room. Joyce could not help feeling stiff and awkward as she followed, and hastily got into her seat before the butler could come behind and push forward the chair. She was a little afraid of him hovering behind, and wondered if he knew.

'I hope you like your room,' Mrs. Hayward said. 'It is small, but I think it is nice; and, Baker, remember to let down the sun-blinds before the afternoon sun gets in. Miss Hayward will not like to find it all in a blaze. That is the worst of a western aspect. Henry, some invitations have come——'

'Ah!' said the Colonel, 'we have more to consider now than we used to have, Elizabeth. There is Joyce to be thought of——'

'Oh,' Joyce cried, growing very red, 'I hope you will not think of me!'

'For some things, of course, we must consider her, Henry,' said Mrs. Hayward, taking no notice of Joyce's hurried exclamation. 'There are nothing but garden-parties all about, and she must go to some of them. It will be the best way of making her known.'

'You always think of the right thing, my dear,' the Colonel said.

'But when it is for dinner, Henry, until people know her, Joyce will not mind, she will stay at home.'

'I wish,' said Joyce, with a horrified alarm—'oh, I wish you would never think of me! I would not like—I could not think, I—I would be afraid to go to parties—I——'

'My dear,' said Colonel Hayward, 'perhaps there may be—dressmakers to think of—or something of that sort.'

'I think you may trust me to look after that,' said Mrs. Hayward, with a glance at Baker, who was listening with benignant interest. Joyce had a keen enough feminine sense to know that Baker was not to be taken into the confidence of the family; and accordingly she made no further interruption, but allowed the conversation to go on without attempting to take any part in it. She heard them discuss names which were without any meaning to her, and kept shyly, and, as she felt, stiffly still, endeavouring with all her might to look as if she knew nothing at all about it, as if it did not at all refer to her—which went sadly against her with her step-mother, who was eagerly on the outlook for indications of character, and to whom Joyce's apparent indifference was an offence—though she would probably have been equally offended had the girl shown too much interest. When Baker left the room, Mrs. Hayward turned to her again.

'The Colonel was quite right,' she said; 'though I didn't wish to discuss it before the servants. You must want some dresses. You are very nice as you are for indoors, but there is a great deal of dress now worn at garden-parties. And what is called a simple toilet is just the most troublesome of all. For it has to be so fresh and so perfect, not a crumpled ribbon, not a fold out of order. You must go with me to choose some patterns.'

Joyce coloured high again. She felt offended, proud—and yet knew she had no right to be either. 'If I may speak,' she said, 'I never thought of parties. I would perhaps not know—how to behave. Oh, if you will be so kind as never to mind me! I will stay at home.'

Colonel Hayward put out his hand with his tender smile, and patted hers where it touched the table. 'You will behave prettier—than any of them,' the old soldier said.

'Oh, don't put nonsense in the girl's head, Henry!' cried his wife with impatience. 'You may very likely be wanting a little, Joyce. You may feel awkward: it would be quite natural. The only thing is, you must begin some time—and the best way is to get your awkwardness over as soon as possible. Afternoon parties are more informal than dances, and so forth. They don't demand so much, and you could pass in the crowd.'

Though Joyce had been frightened at the idea of parties, and though it was her own suggestion that she would not know how to behave, she did not like this. It sent the blood coursing through her veins. To pass in a crowd—to be tolerated where much was not demanded! How different was this from the old dreams in which Lady Joyce had been supreme! But these were but dreams, and she was ashamed to have ever been so vain. She stole away, while they stood in the hall discussing this question, with a sense of humiliation unspeakable, and retreated so quickly that her disappearance was not remarked, back to the west room once more. She shut the door upon herself, and said half aloud in the silence and solitude, how good a thing it was that they had given her this room of her own in which she could take shelter, and be in nobody's way: and then for want of anything else to do, she fell suddenly, without warning, into a long fit of crying, tears irrestrainable, silent, overwhelming, that seemed as if they would carry her away.

Poor Joyce felt that her fate was harder than she could bear—to be carried away from her homely state, in which she had been accustomed to something of the ideal eminence of her dreams, into this, which was supposed by everybody to be social elevation, and was humiliation, downfall—a fall into depths which she had never realised, which had never seemed possible for her. She cried like a child, feeling no power, nor indeed any wish, to stop crying, in a hopeless self-abandonment. Altogether, she was like a child, feeling herself lost, undervalued, neglected, and as if all the rest of the world were happy and in their natural places, while she was left here in a little room by herself all alone. And to add to the humiliation, Baker came in, soft, stepping like a large noiseless black cat, to put down the blinds, as his mistress had told him, and found her in the midst of that speechless torrent of weeping, unable to stop herself or to keep up appearances in any way. 'Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Hayward,' Baker said, in subdued apology,

shot with a glance of eager curiosity and inquisitiveness: for he wanted very much to know something about this daughter who had appeared so suddenly, and of whom no one had ever heard before. Joyce started up to her feet, and hurrying to the bookcase, took out all the books again in order to give herself a countenance. She turned her back upon him; but he could see very well the quivering of her shoulders, which all her pride and dismay at having betrayed herself could not stop.

This curious state of affairs continued for two or three days. Joyce withdrew to her room when the meals were over, at which she was nervously on the watch for anything that might be said concerning her and her mode of existence. It was the third or fourth day before anything was said. Then Mrs. Hayward stopped her as she was stealing away, and laid a hand upon her shoulder. 'Joyce, wait for a moment; let me speak to you. I am not going to interfere with what you wish: but do you really like best to spend all your time alone?'

'I thought,' said Joyce, with a choking voice, for her heart had suddenly begun to thump so in her throat that she could scarcely hear,—'I thought—that I was to stay there: that perhaps you thought it best.'

'How could you think I was such a barbarous wretch! Joyce, if you mean to make life a fight——'

The girl opened her eyes wide with wonder and dismay.

'That is not what you meant to say, Elizabeth,' said the Colonel, coming up to them: his wife had thought he was out of the way, and made a little gesture of impatience on seeing him.

'Don't interfere, for heaven's sake, Henry! unless you will manage affairs yourself, which would be much the best way. You make things much more difficult for me, as perhaps you are aware, Joyce.'

'No; I did not know. I thought when you said I should have a room—for myself——'

'That I meant you to live there like a prisoner in your father's house? Are you aware that you are in your father's house?'

Joyce turned her eyes from one to the other with a mute appeal. Then she said, 'Yes,' faintly, not with the vehemence of her former impulses. 'If *she* had been patient and not run away,' she added, with a little solemnity, after a pause, 'it would not have been so unhappy for us all. I would at least have known—my father.'

'You see that?' cried Mrs. Hayward, though she did not

understand why these words were said. 'Then you have some common-sense after all, and surely you will get to understand.'

'Why do you say that, Joyce—why do you say that?' said the Colonel, laying his hand upon her arm. He was growing very pale and anxious, nervous and frightened, distinguished soldier as he was, by this sudden outburst of hostilities. To see two armies engaged is one thing, but it is quite another to see two women under your own roof—— 'Joyce, you must not say that,' he repeated, leaning his hand, which she could feel tremble, upon her arm; 'you must listen to what Elizabeth—I mean, to what your mother says.'

'Don't call me her mother, Henry. She doesn't like it, and I am not sure that I do either. But we might be friends for all that—so long as she has sense—— Don't you see, child, that we can't live if you go on in this way? It is getting on my nerves!' cried Mrs. Hayward with excitement, 'and upon *his* nerves, and affecting the whole house. Why should you like to shut yourself up as if we were your enemies, and upset everybody? I can't settle to anything. I can't sleep. I don't know what I am doing. And how you can like——'

'But I do not like it,' said Joyce. 'I did not think I could bear it any longer: everything is so strange to me. I used to think I would know by instinct; but it appears I was very silly all the time—for I don't think I know how to behave.'

Joyce hated herself for feeling so near crying: why should a girl cry at everything when she does not wish to cry at all? The same thought was flying through Mrs. Hayward's mind, who had actually dropped one hot and heavy tear, which she hoped no one saw. She put up her hand hastily to stop the Colonel, who was about to make one of those speeches which would have given the finishing touch.

'Then,' she said, 'run and get your work, if you have any work, or your book, or whatever you are doing, and come to the drawing-room like a Christian: for we should all go out of our senses altogether if we went on much longer in this way.'

The Colonel patted his daughter's arm and hastened to open the door for her like an old courtier. 'I told you,' he said, 'turning round to his wife, 'that as soon as you spoke to her, Elizabeth, she would respond. You are a little hasty, my dear, though never with me. I knew that as soon as she saw what a heart you have——'

'Oh, never mind my heart, Henry! Don't talk to Joyce about

my heart. I think she has a little common-sense. And if that's so, we shall get on.'

And then Joyce began to spend all her time in the drawing-room, sadly ill at ease, not knowing what to do. She sat there sounding the depths of her own ignorance, often for hours together, as much alone as when in the west room, feeling herself to sit like a wooden figure in her chair, conscious to her finger-tips of awkwardness, foolishness, vacancy, which had never come into her life before. She had no needlework to give her a pretence of occupation : and as for books, those that were about on the tables were not intended to be read, except the novels from Mudie's, which had this disadvantage, that when they were readable at all, Joyce got absorbed in them, and forgot herself, and would sometimes forget Mrs. Hayward too. She had a feeling that she should be at Mrs. Hayward's disposal while they were together, so that this lapse occurring now and then, filled her with compunction and shame. But when visitors came, that was the worst of all.

CHAPTER XIX

ON one of these mornings the Colonel came to her almost stealthily, with a very soft step, while she was in the drawing-room alone. Joyce had no book that morning, and was more in despair than ever for something to do. She was kneeling in front of one of the pretty pieces of Indian work, copying the pattern on a sheet of paper. When she heard her father's step, she started as if found out in some act of guilt, grew very red, and dropped her pencil out of her trembling hand.

'I beg your pardon,' she said involuntarily. 'I—had nothing to do. It is a wonderful pattern. I thought I should like to copy it——'

'Surely, my dear—and very prettily you have done it too; but you must try to recollect that everything is yours, and that you have no need to ask pardon. I want you to come with me into my library. I believe you have never seen my library, Joyce.'

No, she had not been able to take the freedom either of a child of the house or of an ordinary visitor. She was afraid to go anywhere beyond the ordinary thoroughfare, from dining-room to drawing-room. 'I saw an open door,' she said, 'and some books.'

'But you did not come in? Come now. I have something to say to you.' There was a look in the old soldier's eye of unlawful pleasure, a gratification enhanced by the danger of being found out, and perhaps suffering for it. He led Joyce away with the glee of a truant schoolboy. 'My wife is busy,' he said, with an air of innocent hypocrisy. 'She can't want either of us for the moment. Come in, come in. And, my dear,' he said, putting again his caressing hand upon his daughter's shoulder, 'remember, that when I am not in the garden, I'm here: and when you have anything to say to your father, I'm always ready—always ready. I hope you will learn—to take your father into your confidence. Joyce.'

She did not make any reply ; her head drooped, and her voice was choked. He was so kind—and yet confidence was so hard a thing to give.

‘That reminds me,’ he said, still more gently, ‘that I don’t think you ever call me father, Joyce.’

‘Oh,’ she said, not daring to lift her eyes, ‘but I think it—in my heart.’

‘You must say it—with your lips, my dear ; and you must not be afraid of the people who are nearest to you in the world. You must have confidence in us, Joyce. And now look here, my little girl ; I have something to give you—not any pretty thing for a present,’ said the Colonel, sitting down before his desk and pulling out a drawer, ‘but something we can’t get on without. I got it for you in this form that you might use it as you please ; remember it is not for clothes but only for your own pleasure, to do what you like with.’ He held out to her, with the most fatherly kind smile, four crisp and clean five-pound notes. Joyce looked at them bewildered, not knowing what they were, and then gave a choking cry, and drew back, covering her face with her hands.

‘Money !’ she cried, and a pang of mortification went through her like the sharp stab of a knife.

‘Well, my dear, you must have money, and who should give it you but your father ? Joyce ! why, this is worse and worse.’ The Colonel grew angry in his complete bewilderment, and the disagreeable sensation of kindness refused. ‘What can you mean ?’ he cried ; ‘am I to have nothing to do with you though you are my daughter ?’ He got up from his chair impatiently. ‘I thought you would like it to be between ourselves. I made a little secret of it, thinking to please you. No ; I confess that I don’t understand you, Joyce : if Elizabeth were here, I should tell her so.’ He flung down the notes upon his table, where they lay fluttering in the morning breeze that came in at the open window. ‘She must do what she can, for I don’t pretend to be able to do anything,’ the Colonel cried.

Joyce stood before him, collecting herself, calming down her own excitement as best she could. She said to herself that he was quite right—that it would have to be—that she had no independent life or plan of her own any more—that she must accept everything from her father’s hands. What right had she either to refuse or to resent ? How foolish it was, how miserable, ungenerous of her, not to be able to take ! Must it not sometimes be more gracious, more sweet to take, to receive, than to give ? And yet to accept this from one who was almost a stranger though

her father, seemed impossible, and made her whole being, body and soul, quiver with that sensation of the intolerable in which there is neither rhyme nor reason. Though she was so young, she had provided for her own necessities for years. They were very few, and her little salary was very small; but she had done it, *giving rather than getting*—for naturally there was nothing to spare from Peter Matheson's ploughman's wages. She stood shrinking a little from her father's displeasure—so unused to anything of the kind!—but with all these thoughts sweeping through the mind, which was only a girl's mind, in many ways wayward and fantastic, but yet at bottom a clear spirit, candid and reasonable. This would have to be. She must accept the money, she who had been so independent. She must learn how to live, that tremendous lesson, in the manner possible to her, not in her own way. Once more she thought of her mother obeying her foolish impulse, flying from her troubles—only to fall fatally under them, and to leave their heritage to her daughter. It did not require a moment to bring all these reflections in a flood through her mind, nor even to touch her with the thought of her father's little tender artifice, and of how he had calculated no doubt that she would have presents to send, help to offer—or, at least, pleasure to bestow. Perhaps her imagination put thoughts even more delicate and kind into the Colonel's mind than those which were there—which was saying much. She recovered her voice with a great effort.

'Father——' she said, then paused again, struggling with something in her throat,—'I hope you will forgive me. I—never took money—from any one—before——'

'You never had your father before to give it you, Joyce.' A little word calmed down the Colonel's superficial resentment. It did more, it went straight to his heart. He came up to her and put his arm round her. 'My child,' he said, in the words of the parable, "all that I have is thine." You forget that.'

'Father, if I could only feel that *you* were mine. It is all wrong—all wrong!' cried Joyce. 'It is like what the Bible says; I want to be born again.'

The Colonel did not know what to say to this, which seemed to him almost profane; but he did better than speaking—he held her close to him, and patted her shoulder softly with his large tender hand.

'And I will, I will,' said Joyce, with a Scotch confusion of tenses, 'if you will have a little patience with me. It cannot come all in a moment; but I will, I will.'

'We'll all have patience,' said the Colonel, stooping over her,

feeling in his general weakness, and with even a passing sigh for Elizabeth going through his mind, that it was sweet to have the positions reversed sometimes, and to feel somebody depend upon him, and appeal to his superior wisdom.

At this moment Mrs. Hayward opened the door of her husband's room quickly, coming in with natural freedom. She stopped 'as if she had been shot' when she saw this group—Joyce sheltered in her father's arm, leaning against him. She made a rapid exclamation, 'Oh !' and turning as quickly as she had come, closed the door after her with a quick clear sound which said more than words. She did not slam it—far from that. She would not have done such a thing, neither for her own sake, nor out of regard for what the servants would say : but she shut it sharply, distinctly, with a punctuation which was more emphatic than any full stop could be.

In the afternoon there were callers, and Joyce became aware, for the first time, of the social difficulties of her position. She heard the words, 'brought up by relations in Scotland,' as she went through the drawing-room to the verandah where the visitors were sitting with Mrs. Hayward. Joyce did not apply the words to herself, but she perceived a little stir of interest when she appeared timidly at the glass door. The lady was a little woman, precise and neat, with an indescribable air of modest importance, yet insignificance, which Joyce learned afterwards to understand, and the gentleman was in a long black coat, with a soft felt hat in his hands. Eyes more instructed would have divined the clergyman and clergywoman of the district, not rector and rectoress, but simple incumbents. They rose up to meet her, and shook hands in a marked way, as 'taking an interest' in a new member of their little cure ; but Joyce, unaccustomed, did not understand the meaning of this warmth. It disconcerted her a little, and so did the conversation into which Mr. Sitwell at once began to draw her, while his wife conversed in a lower tone with the lady of the house. He talked to her of the river and boating, of which she knew nothing, and then of lawn-tennis, to which her response was not more warm. The good clergyman thought that perhaps the game had not penetrated to the wilds of Scotland, and changed the subject.

'We are going to have our children's treat next week,' he said. 'It would be very kind of you to come and help my wife, who has everything to manage. Our district is but a new one—we have not much aid as yet. Do you take any interest in schools, Miss Hayward ?'

'Oh yes, a great interest,' cried Joyce, lighting up, 'that is just my——' she was going to say profession, having a high opinion of the dignity of her former office: but before the word was said she caught a warning glance from Mrs. Hayward—'it is what I care most for in the world,' she said, with a sudden blush of shame to feel herself stopped in that avowal of enthusiasm for the work itself.

'Indeed!' cried the clergyman. 'Do you hear, Dora? here is a help for you. Miss Hayward says that schools are what she cares most for in the world.'

'Joyce says a little more than she means,' said Mrs. Hayward quickly. 'Young ladies have a way of being enthusiastic.'

'Don't damp it, please!' cried Mrs. Sitwell, clasping her hands; 'enthusiasm is so beautiful in young people: and there is so little of it. Oh, how delighted I shall be to have your help! The district is so new—as my husband would tell you.'

'Of course I have enlisted Miss Hayward at once,' cried he. 'She is going to help at the school feast.'

'Oh, thank you, THANK you,' cried the clergyman's wife, with devotion, once more clasping her hands.

Mrs. Hayward's voice was more dry than ever—there was a sharp ring in it, which Joyce had begun to know. 'You must let her give you an answer later,' she said. 'She doesn't know her engagements yet. We have several things to do. When must I send in the cakes, Mrs. Sitwell? We always calculate, you know, on helping in that way.'

'You are always so kind, dear Mrs. Hayward, so kind! How can we ever thank you enough!' said the clergywoman. 'Always kind,' her husband echoed, with an impressive shake of Mrs. Hayward's hand, and afterwards of Joyce's, who was confused by so much feeling. Her step-mother was drier still as they went away.

'I must ask you, just at first, to make no engagements without consulting me,' she said very rigidly. 'You cannot know—at first—what it is best for your own interests to do.'

Should she say that she had made no engagements, and wished for none? It is hard not to defend one's self when one is blamed. But Joyce took the wiser way, and assented without explanations. She had scarcely time to do more when other people came—people more important, as was at once evident—a large lady in black satin and lace, a younger, slimmer one in white. They filled the verandah, which was not very broad, with the sweep of their draperies. They both gave a little glance of surprise when Miss

Hayward was presented to them, and the elder lady permitted herself an 'Oh——!' She retired to the end of the verandah, where Mrs. Hayward had installed herself. 'I never knew before that you had a grown-up daughter. I always thought, indeed, that there were no——'

'My husband's daughter by his first marriage,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'She has never lived at home. In India, you know, children can never be kept with their parents.'

'It is a dreadful drawback. I am so glad my girls will have nothing to say to Indian men.'

The lady in white had begun to talk to Joyce, but the girl's ears were intent on the other conversation which she felt to concern herself. She made vague replies, not knowing what she said, the two voices in the distance drawing all her attention from the one more near.

'So she had to be left with relations—quite old-fashioned people—and she is very simple, and knows very little of the world.'

'The less the better,' said the visitor, whose name Joyce had not caught; and then there was a pause, and the young lady's voice became more audible, close to her ear.

'Brought up in Scotland? Oh, I hope you are not one of the learned ladies. Don't they go in tremendously for education in Scotland?' her visitor said.

'They say our Scotch schools are the best,' said Joyce sedately, with a mixture of national and professional pride.

'Oh yes, so everybody says; you are taught everything. I know Scotland a little: everybody goes there in the autumn, don't you know? I wonder if I have been in your part of the country? Papa has a moor whenever he can afford it. And we have quantities of Scotch cousins all over the place.'

'It was near Edinburgh,' said Joyce, with a little hesitation.

'Yes? I have been at several places near Edinburgh,' said the young lady. 'Craigmoor where the Sinclairs live, for one. They are relations of ours. And there is another house, a very nice house close by, Bellendean. I suppose you know the Bellendeans.'

The colour rushed over Joyce's face. She remembered her difficulties no more. The very sound of the name filled her with pleasure and encouragement.

'Bellendean!' she said; 'oh, indeed, I know Bellendean! I know it better than any place in the world. And I know the lady—oh, better than any one. And would it be Miss Greta that was your cousin——?' Joyce's countenance shone. She forgot all about those bewildering explanations which she had overheard:

and about herself, whose presence had to be accounted for. For a moment her natural ease and unconsciousness came back, and she felt herself Joyce again.

Mrs. Hayward rose suddenly from her chair. She, too, had been listening, through her own conversation, to the other voices. She made a step forward—‘So you know the Bellendans,’ she said, with an agitated smile. ‘We have just been staying there, and can give you the latest news of them. What a small world it is, as everybody says! I only heard of them for the first time when we went to fetch Joyce; and now I find my nearest neighbours know all about them! Joyce, will you ask if Baker is bringing tea?’

Lady St. Clair and her daughter gave each other a glance of mutual inquiry. And Joyce, as she obeyed, with a curious pang of wonder and pleasure and annoyance, heard the discussion begin, the interchange of questions mingled with remarks about her friends, the names so dear to her passing from mouth to mouth. She was sent away who knew all about them, while her step-mother, who knew so little, talked, adopting an air of familiarity. Why was she sent away? Then she remembered suddenly on what a humble footing she could alone claim knowledge of the Bellendans, and divined with a shock of sudden pain that it was to stop any revelations on that subject that she had been despatched on this unnecessary errand. Joyce paused in the luxurious room, which seemed somehow to absorb all the air and leave none to breathe. Oh for the freedom of Bellendean, where everybody knew who she was and thought no harm! Oh for the little cottage, where there were no pretences! The great and the small were easy, they understood each other; but this middle country, all full of reserves and assumptions which lay between, how was an ignorant creature to learn how to live in it, to avoid the snares and keep clear of the pitfalls, not to contradict or expose the falsehoods, and yet to be herself true?

Mrs. Hayward, on her side, sitting painfully talking as if she knew all about these people, whom she thought she hated, so much were they involved with this painful episode of her life, was no more happy than Joyce. To think that her neighbours, the best people about, those whose friendship was most desirable, should be mixed up with the Bellendans, who knew everything! So that now her skilful little romance must fall to the ground, and all the story be fully known.

CHAPTER XX

THE discussions held upon this question in the Colonel's room were many. Mrs. Hayward had kept herself for many years out of society, rejecting it all the more sternly because she loved it and held all its little punctilios dear. And now that all necessity for such self-denial was over, to have everything risked again was terrible to her. She who had so carefully kept her husband from annoyance, in this matter departed from all her traditions. The good Colonel himself was fond of society too. He liked to know people, to gather kindly faces about him, and to be surrounded by a cheerful stir of human interests; but to tell the truth, he did not care very much about Lady St. Clair and the best people in the neighbourhood. It was seldom—very seldom—that it occurred to him to criticise his Elizabeth; but on this point he thought her a little mistaken, and not so infallible as she usually was.

‘Have patience a little, my dear,’ he said, falling upon a simple philosophy, which, indeed, he was not at all disposed himself to put in practice, ‘and you’ll see all will come right.’

‘Nothing will come right,’ said Mrs. Hayward, ‘unless we can get your daughter properly introduced. It alters everything in our position, Henry. We were settling down to society such as suits you and me; but that will not do now. The moment there is a young lady in the house all is changed. She must be thought of. A different kind of entertainment is wanted for a girl. I ought to take her to balls, and to water-parties, and to all sorts of gaieties. You would not like her to be left out.’

‘Well, my dear,’ said the Colonel, more cheerfully, ‘I like young faces, and I don’t object to a little dance now and then. I always, indeed, encouraged the young fellows in the regiment——’

‘If it were giving a dance that was all!—you may be sure I shouldn’t come to you about that.’ There is a great deal involved that is of much more importance. If it all gets abroad about your

daughter, everything will suffer—she in the first place. It will be like a governess—every one respects a governess——’

‘Surely, my dear. A good girl who perhaps does it to help her family, or support her old mother, or——’

‘Henry, my dear, you are very old-fashioned. But however good she may be, she is always at a disadvantage. It would be bad for us too. Colonel Hayward’s daughter a governess! They would say you were either less well off than you appeared, or that you had used her badly, or that I had used her badly—still more likely.’

‘But when we did not know of her very existence, Elizabeth!’

‘How are you to tell people that? The best thing is to keep quite quiet about it, if we only can. But now here is this new complication. These Bellendean people will talk it all over with the St. Clairs, and the St. Clairs will publish it everywhere. And people will be sorry for her, and pick her to pieces, and say it is easy to see she is unused to our world; they will be sorry for her for being with me, or else be sorry for me for being burdened with her.’

‘Elizabeth——’

‘And the worst is,’ she said vehemently, ‘that it will be quite true on both sides. She will be to be pitied, and I shall be to be pitied. If only these friends of hers could be kept quiet! If only she could be dressed properly, and taught to hold her tongue and say nothing about her past!’

The Colonel got up and began to walk about the room in great perturbation of spirit. He could not say, as he had been in the habit of saying, ‘If Elizabeth were but here!’ for it was Elizabeth herself—extraordinary fact!—who was the cause of the trouble. Social difficulties had not affected them till now; and what could he do or suggest in face of an emergency which was too much for Elizabeth? The poor gentleman was without resource, and he had a faint sense of injury, a feeling that he had never expected to be consulted or to have to advise in such a matter. All the difficulties in their way of a personal character had been Elizabeth’s business, not his. He walked about with a troubled brow, a face full of distress,—what could he do or say? It was almost cruel of her to consult him, to put matters which he had never pretended to be able to manage into his hands.

Mrs. Hayward, on her side, felt a faint gleam of alleviation in the midst of the gloom from the spectacle of the Colonel’s perturbation. It was his affair after all, and he had the best right to suffer; and though she expected no help from him, there was a

certain satisfaction and almost diversion in the depth of his helpless distress. They were, however, brought to a sudden standstill, which was a relief to both, by a ring at the door-bell, a very unusual thing in the morning. The clouds dispersed from Mrs. Hayward's brow. She put up her hand instinctively to her cap. Agitation of any kind, though it may seem a remarkable effect, does derange one's cap, as everybody who wears such a head-dress knows. 'It can't be any one coming to call at this hour,' she said. 'It must be some of your men intending to stay for lunch.'

A weight was lifted off the Colonel's mind by this resumption of ordinary tones and subjects. He was always glad to see one of 'his men,' as Mrs. Hayward called them, to lunch, being of the most hospitable disposition; and it was his experience that the presence of a stranger was always perfectly efficacious in blowing away clouds that might arise on the family firmament. Besides, in the strained condition of family affairs, a third, or rather fourth party, who knew nothing about the circumstances, could not but make that meal more cheerful. They stood and listened for a moment while some one was evidently admitted, with some surprise that Baker did not appear to announce the visitor. Presently, however, the door was opened with that mixture of swiftness and hesitation which was characteristic of Joyce, and she herself looked in, more awakened and with a brighter countenance than either of the pair had yet seen in her. Her shyness had disappeared in the excitement of a pleasant surprise; her cheeks had got a little colour; the eager air which had struck Colonel Hayward when he first saw her, but which of late had been so much subdued, had returned to her eyes and sensitive mouth. 'Oh, it's the Captain!' she said, with a sense of the importance of the announcement, as if she had been presenting the Prince of Wales at least, which changed the entire sentiment of her face. Mrs. Hayward had never before seen the natural Joyce as she was in the humility of her early undisturbed state. She acknowledged the charm of the girl with a keen little sudden pang of that appreciation and comprehension of jealousy, which is more clear-sighted and certain than love.

'The Captain!' she said, not quite aware who was meant, yet putting on an air of more ignorance than was genuine.

'Oh, Bellendean!' cried the Colonel, going forward with cordiality. 'My dear fellow, how glad I am to see you! You've got away, then, from all your anxious friends. Elizabeth, you remember Captain Bellendean?'

'I am not likely to have forgotten him,' Mrs. Hayward said graciously, yet with a meaning which perhaps was not so gracious

as her speech. And there darted through her mind, as is so usual with women, a question, a calculation. Was it for Joyce? Men are so silly; who can tell how they may be influenced? There flashed through her a gleam of delight at the thought of thus getting rid of the interloper, and at the same time an angry grudge that this girl, who seemed to have all the luck, should come to such honour, and be thus set on high above so many who were her betters. All this in the twinkling of an eye. She stood for a minute or two and talked, asking the proper questions about his family, and when he came to town, and how long he meant to stay; then left the visitor with her husband, and hastened to say something about the luncheon to Baker, who on his part was lingering outside with a message from the cook. To those who feel an interest in such matters, we may say that Mrs. Hayward, when one of the Colonel's men made his appearance unexpectedly for luncheon, generally added a dish of curry, for which her cook was noted (the men being almost all old Indians), to that meal.

When she returned to the drawing-room, Joyce was there, still with the same look of exhilaration and liveliness. She was even the first to speak—a singular circumstance. 'I hope,' she said, 'I was not wrong in taking the Captain to the library. I thought, as you were not here, he would like that better than just talking to me.'

Was this false humility? or affectation? or what was it? 'You were quite right, no doubt; for it must have been your father he came to see,' said Mrs. Hayward, with a quick glance. She was prepared to see a conscious smile upon Joyce's mouth, the little air of demure triumph with which a girl who knows herself the object of such a visit acquiesces in the fact that it is for her father. But no such consciousness was upon Joyce's countenance. 'You seem to be very much pleased to see him,' she continued. 'And why do you call him the Captain, as if there were not another in the world?'

Joyce paused a little before she answered. 'I think,' she said, 'that the people at Bellendean did think there was not another such Captain in the world.'

'And you are glad to see him—because you know him so well? because he reminds you of your old life?'

Joyce grew red all at once with a blush, which surely meant something. Again she paused a little, with that sense of walking among snares and man-traps, which confuses the mind. 'Oh no; I did not know him well. I have only spoken to him two or three times. It is so difficult to explain. You will perhaps not be

pleased if I say it. To me that am not accustomed—the Captain's coming seemed like a great honour.' She stopped short, and the colour went out of her face as suddenly as it came.

'A great honour!' cried Mrs. Hayward with indignation,—'to his commanding officer!' It was all she could do to keep her temper. Her foot patted the carpet angrily, and she tore a band of calico off a piece upon her lap with vehemence, as if she were inflicting pain and liked to do so. 'What an extraordinary notion!' she cried. 'Norman Bellendean, a little Scotch squire—that anybody should think his visit an honour to my husband!' There was a sort of subdued fury in her laugh of scorn.

'I can see,' said Joyce, 'it was very silly to say that; and it was only a sort of instinct. I forgot when I saw him—all that has happened—and that I was a—different creature.'

'Joyce,' cried Mrs. Hayward quickly, 'I warn you that unless you can get over this constant going back upon your old life, and try and adapt yourself to your present circumstances, it will be impossible for us—impossible for me—almost beyond any one's powers——'

Joyce had become very pale. She did not make any reply, but waited with her lips moving in an eagerness so different from that joyous eagerness of her former aspect, for the next word that should be said. What was it that would be impossible? There is something in a threat which rouses the most placid blood. If it was impossible, what would happen? Joyce was in no way in fault; the circumstances which had changed her life, and transplanted her from her home, were not of her creating any more than they were of Mrs. Hayward's. But Mrs. Hayward said nothing more. She went on tearing, wounding, cutting her calico with stabs and thrusts of the scissors that seemed as if they must draw blood. But she had gone as far as could be done unintentionally by sudden impulse—which, and no set purpose, was what had moved her. And she had come to herself by dint of that half-spoken threat. She had no desire to be cruel or even unkind; her desire, indeed, was quite different, if one could have come to the bottom of her heart. She would have given a great deal to have been upon comfortable terms with her step-daughter, and to have been able to quench the jealousy and the grudge with which, deeply ashamed of them all the time, she had taken in this third between the two who were so happy—this interloper, this supplanter, whom she had seen her husband embrace so tenderly, and heard saying with a voice full of emotion 'father'—a word never to be addressed to him by child of her own.

Once more, however, this uncomfortable state of affairs was brought to a pause by the recurrence of the ordinary course of domestic events. The voices of the Colonel and Captain Bellendean became audible crossing the hall towards the drawing-room door. At the first sound of these voices, Mrs. Hayward threw her calico into the work-basket, and tore and stabbed at it no more. She relapsed suddenly into tranquil hemming, like a good child at school. Joyce had not the same cover for her agitation, but yet she collected herself as quickly as was possible, and made believe to be as quietly occupied and at her ease as her step-mother was.

‘I should have thought,’ said the Colonel, opening the door as he spoke, and bringing in this new subject with him, ‘that a pokey house in London, now that the season is more than half over, would be a bad change after your beautiful place; but that’s our mistake thinking of other people, as if they were just the same as we are—which nobody is, as a matter of fact.’

Mrs. Hayward thought her husband meant this for her, as a reproach in respect to Joyce—which he did not, being totally incapable of any such covert assault.

‘My father has always been fond of society,’ said Captain Bellendean. ‘I suspect my beautiful place, as you are kind enough to call it, was always a great bondage to him.’

‘Joyce, I want you to show Bellendean the garden and the river,’ said the Colonel; ‘I have a——letter to finish. Take him down to the water, and show him the willows, and the poet’s villa, and all that. Have you got a hat handy, my dear, or a parasol, or something? for it’s very hot. You must take care not to get a sunstroke, or anything of that sort. This is the way, Bellendean. It’s only a little bit of a place, not like your castle; but we’re very much pleased with it for all that. The verandah is our own idea. It is the nicest possible place in the afternoon, when the sun is off this side of the house. My wife planned it all herself. Walk down under the shrubbery: you will have shade the whole way. The river’s sparkling like diamonds,’ he said, as he stood bareheaded in the moderate English sun, which he kept up a pretence of dreading as an old Indian ought, and watched the pair as they obeyed his directions somewhat shyly, not quite understanding why they were sent off together. Colonel Hayward came back to the drawing-room where his wife sat, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. ‘I have sent them off that they may have a quiet word, with nobody to interfere.’

‘Why should they want a quiet word? Was it *her* he came

to see? Do you suppose he means anything?' said Mrs. Hayward, in that unsympathetic tone.

'They may not perhaps have anything particular to say; but they come from the same place, and they know the same people, and probably they would not like to talk their little talks about old friends with us listening to every word; so I said I had a letter to finish,' said the Colonel, with a mild chuckle. 'I must go and do it though, that they may not think it was a pretence.'

'Do you know, Henry,' said Mrs. Hayward, 'that some people would say you were throwing your daughter at Captain Bellendean's head?'

'Bless me!' said the Colonel, with a wondering look; 'throwing my daughter at—— Elizabeth, these would surely be very unpleasant people, not the kind that ever had anything to do with you and me.' He paused a moment, looking at her with an appeal which she did not lift her eyes to see. Then he repeated, 'I must go, though, and finish my letter, or they will think it was only a pretence.'

Perhaps Captain Bellendean had some faint notion that it was, as he walked along under the shade of the shrubbery skirting the long but narrow lawn towards the river, which flowed shining and sparkling in the full sun—half amused to find himself walking by the side of the heroine of the curious story which had been worked out under his roof—the little schoolmistress turned into a young lady of leisure, transplanted out of her natural place. He was not without a little natural curiosity as to how such a strange travesty would succeed. There was nothing in her appearance to emphasise the change. She walked slowly, almost reluctantly, with that shyness which is not unbecoming to youth, as if she would have liked to fly and leave him unguided to his own devices. He gave her a good many glances under his eyebrows as they walked along very gravely together, scarcely speaking. Certainly if Colonel Hayward meant to throw his daughter at the Captain's head, she had no intention that way.

'The last time I saw you, Miss Joyce,' he said, 'was the evening before you left home. And you thought England and London would be a new world. What do you think of the new world, now that you have seen them near?'

'Did I say they would be a new world?' Joyce sighed a little, looking up to the Captain with a faint smile, which made, he thought, a charming combination. She added, 'I have only seen London in passing; but I'm beginning to think there is no new world, but just what we make it—and the same in every place.'

'One of the old classical fellows says that, doesn't he?' said the Captain, 'I've forgotten all my Latin; but you're up to everything of that sort——'

'Oh no; I am not a scholar. I just know a little at the very beginning. But I understand what you mean. It is something about changing the skies but not the mind.'

'I wonder if that is what Mrs. Bellendean will do?'

'Mrs. Bellendean?'

'Oh, I forgot; it was your father to whom I was speaking; but you will know better all that this means. My father and his wife have left Bellendean—for good, do you understand, not to come back.'

'For good! but I should think that would rather be for ill,' Joyce said.

'Yes, I knew you would understand. I didn't myself, however, till very lately. I had no conception what she had done for the place, nor how much it was to her. And now they have shaken the dust from off their feet, and left it—as if I could have wished that.'

'They would think,' said Joyce, with an explanatory instinct that belonged to her old position—'the lady would think that perhaps you were likely——'

Here she looked up at him, and suddenly realising that she was not Joyce the schoolmistress, with a little privilege of place, making matters clear, but a young woman discoursing about his own affairs to a young man, stopped suddenly, blushed deeply, and murmured, 'Oh, I beg your pardon,' with a horror of her own rashness which gave double meaning to all she said.

'That perhaps I was likely——?' said Norman. He found her very pleasant company, with her intelligent eager looks, her comprehension of what he meant before it was uttered. 'Tell me what she would think likely. I know so little about—the lady, as you call her. She was only my step-mother, whom I didn't much care for when I went away. It is a mistake to judge people before one knows them,' he added reflectively; but this sentiment, so cognate to her own case, did not in the immediate urgency of the moment arrest Joyce's attention, especially as he repeated with a smile, 'what would she think me likely to do?'

'I was going to speak like an old wife in a cottage—like my dear old granny.'

'Do so, please,' he said, with a laugh; and Joyce yielded to the unknown temptation, which had never come in her way before. The gentle malice of society, the undercurrent of meaning, the

play with which youths and maidens amuse themselves in the beginning of an intercourse which may come to much more serious results, were quite out of her understanding and experience; but there are some things which are very quickly learnt.

'She would think—the old wives would say—that now the Captain was come back, he would be bringing home a lady of his own.'

Joyce said this, not with the absolute calm of two minutes ago, but with a smile and blush which altogether changed the significance of the little speech. It had been an almost matter-of-fact explanation—it became now a little winged arrow of provocation, a sort of challenge. Captain Bellendean laughed. ●

'I see,' he said; 'and you think that is a course open to me? But a lady of my own might not be so good as *the* lady—and then there are difficulties about time, for instance. I might not be able to bring her at once; and the one I wanted might not have me: and—— Miss Joyce, your attention flags—you are not interested in me.'

'I was thinking,' said Joyce, 'that though you laugh, it would be no laughing for her to leave Bellendean.'

The Captain perceived that the joke was to go no further. 'I do not believe it is her doing at all—it is my father's doing. He prefers London—Half Moon Street, and rooms where you can scarcely turn round.'

'Half Moon Street!'

'Do you know it?'

'No more than in books,' said Joyce, with a smile; 'there are so many places that seem kent places because they are in books.'

'Italy, etc.,' the Captain said, looking at her with a sympathetic glance.

'Oh, but not etc.!' cried Joyce. 'Italy—is like nothing else in the world.'

'Well,' said Captain Bellendean, 'when you are in the circumstances which you have just been suggesting to me, no doubt you will go to Italy; that is the right time and the right circumstances——'

Before he had half said these words, a sudden vision of Andrew Halliday flashed across his mind, and he stopped in sudden embarrassment. By this time they had reached the river's side, and Joyce turned dutifully to point out to him the poet's villa, as her father had bidden her; but there was something in her tone which betrayed to the sympathetic listener that the same image had suddenly overshadowed her imagination too. Captain Bellendean

was very sympathetic—more so, perhaps, than he would have been had his companion been older or less pretty. He pretended to look with great interest at the willows sweeping into the water, and the lawn, with its little fringe of forget-me-nots reflected in the softly flowing stream. Joyce had lost the colour which was half excitement, and had kept coming and going like the shadows over the sky, while they walked together down the shady walk. It is very interesting to see a face change in this way, and to think that one's own society, the quickening of the blood produced by one's sudden advent, may have something to do with it. He had felt that it was very pleasant to watch these changes, and was conscious of a little agreeable thrill of responsive exhilaration in his own veins. But when this sudden shadow fell upon Joyce, his sympathy sprang into a warmer, energetic sentiment. Could that be the fate for which this girl was reserved? Surely some one must step in to save her from that fate!

CHAPTER XXI

It was some days before the new difficulties which possessed all Mrs. Hayward's thoughts were fully revealed to Joyce. These early days were long, being full of so many confusing circumstances and new problems to be encountered, solved, or left aside for further trouble in their turn ; and what she had heard her step-mother say about her bringing up had passed over Joyce's mind with little effect. She had enough to do in other ways : to find out a mode of living which would be practicable, to subdue her own spirit, to reconcile herself with so many new necessities all rushing upon her at once. How to apportion her time was in itself a difficulty almost beyond her untried powers : to be long enough, yet not too long, with Mrs. Hayward—to find something to do during these hours which she had to pass in that drawing-room which was so pretty and comfortable, but so little homelike to the stranger. Joyce had abundant resources in herself. She was fully instructed in all kinds of work—a mistress of fine-sewing and mending, able to clothe her household with needlework, like the woman in the Proverbs ; but there was no need for these qualifications here. And she had gone through all the studies which were open to her in design, besides having found out somehow, amid those gifts of nature which to all her early friends had seemed so lavish, a faculty for drawing, which had been of endless pleasure to her, and pride to her belongings in the old time. Music, indeed, was left out, except in so far as it belonged to her profession. She had learned the Hullah system, or something like it, and could read easily all the simple songs which were taught to the children ; but a piano had never been within her reach, nor had she heard anything that a musician would think worth hearing. At home in Bellendean the old people thought that nobody could sing the 'Flowers of the Forest,' or the 'Banks of Doon,' or the old Psalm tunes, which were still dearer, like their Joyce. But

these were not the sort of performances with which to please Mrs. Hayward.

Thus, though she was full of accomplishments in her way, none of Joyce's acquirements stood her in much stead in her new circumstances. She had to contrive something for herself to do, which was far from being easy. She had to think of what she could talk about, to take her fit part in the household intercourse—not to sit like an uninterested spectator between these two strange people, who were her nearest relations. And this was almost the hardest of all; for Colonel Hayward and his wife were like so many people of their class—they had read little, they were puzzled by references to books, and did not understand that keen sense of association and fellowship with her favourite writers and their productions which made Joyce an inhabitant of a second world, to her consciousness almost more real than the external sphere. The Colonel said 'Eh?' as if he had become a little deaf, with a kind but bewildered smile, when she adduced the example—to Joyce more natural than the most familiar examples of every day—of somebody in Scott, or, as she loved to say, Sir Walter, to illustrate a position; while Mrs. Hayward was more apt to frown and to say impatiently that she thought it very wrong for young people to read so many novels. They did not even know what she meant by Sir Walter!—her father, with his puzzled look, suggesting, 'Sir Walter—Gilbert, did you mean, my dear? Now, where can you have met Gilbert, Joyce? and what could he know about the oyster-dredging in the North?' Thus it was against her that she knew more than they did, as well as that she knew less: in either case, she was left out of their circle, out of their world,—her very wealth futile, and more useless than had she been without endowment at all.

But in the preoccupation of so many matters, important beyond measure to her new existence, and much pondering of the way to make that existence possible, which seemed to her sometimes a problem almost beyond her powers of solving, Joyce was not at all quick to catch up the allusions of her stepmother, or to perceive what it was that filled Mrs. Hayward's mind with new alarms. The possibility of there being something to be ashamed of in respect to herself—something to conceal or gloss over, in case it might revolt the visitors, of whom Joyce, hitherto measuring them by the standard of Bellendean, had not formed a very high idea—had never entered her mind; and she was startled beyond measure when Mrs. Hayward opened the subject directly in a moment of impatience, and notwithstanding her own excellent

resolutions against doing so. Joyce had been betrayed into some reference to her old work, which she had instinctively felt to be distasteful and seldom alluded to, but which would crop up now and then. It was Mr. Sitwell, the clergyman, and his school feast, which was the original subject of the talk.

'I think they are playing at school work,' Joyce said. 'I would like to see the mistress, and hear what she says.'

'I beg you will do nothing of the kind,' cried Mrs. Hayward. 'I did not at all like your enthusiasm about the schools when the Sitwells were here. I think you said you were more interested in them than in anything else in the world. I am never fond of extravagance.'

'But it was true,' said Joyce, with a deprecating smile. 'When you have been interested about one thing all your life, and always thinking which is the best way, what can you do but feel it the most important?'

'It is time,' said Mrs. Hayward, 'that you should find another channel for your thoughts. I didn't mean to say anything to vex you, Joyce. But you must know that your father's daughter should have been brought up in a very different way; and, to tell the truth, I would much rather our friends here knew as little as possible—about your antecedents.'

Joyce looked up astonished, with a quick cry, 'Antecedents!' which was a word that seemed to imply something bad, like the reports in the newspapers. She was, to be sure, too well instructed to think that implication necessary; but there are prejudices of which even the best-informed persons cannot shake themselves free.

'You know what I mean!—the teaching, and all that. That you should be fond of the schools, and interested in them, is all very well; but that you were a——'

A flush of deep colour had rushed over Joyce's uplifted face. 'A—schoolmistress,' she said, with the quiver of a piteous little smile.

'I can't bear to hear you say it—your father's daughter!—and of course it is impossible to enter into particulars, and explain everything to everybody. I think it better, far better, to draw a veil. You were brought up by relations in Scotland—that is what I mean to say.'

'Relations!' repeated Joyce softly; 'thank you for saying that. Oh, and so they were!—the kindest relations that ever a poor little girl had.'

'I am glad I have pleased you, so far as that goes,' said Mrs.

Hayward, in a tone of relief. 'Well, then, I hope you will back me up, and show yourself grateful to your old friends. There are various other things I may mention as we are on this subject. For instance, when you were talking to Alice St. Clair you said *Miss Greta*. Now that young lady, if you were to renew your acquaintance with her, would certainly not allow you to call her *Miss now*.'

Joyce opened her eager lips to reply, but, struck by a sudden sense of the uselessness of any explanation, closed them again—a movement not unnoticed by her companion.

'I notice also,' said Mrs. Hayward, 'that you have a way of calling Mrs. Bellendean the Lady. That's all very well if it's one of the fantastic names that girls are so fond of nowadays—I mean, if other young people use it as well as you; but if it's one of your terms of respect—— Remember, Joyce, that to go on speaking in that way is a—is a kind of insult to your father and to your own family, which is quite as good as Mrs. Bellendean's.'

As good as Mrs. Bellendean's!—her heart revolted against this claim. The old homage which she had given with youthful enthusiasm was not to Mrs. Bellendean's position or her family. But how was Joyce to explain this to her judge, who did not look upon her or her romances with a favourable eye? And yet she could not but say a word in self-defence. 'It was for kindness,' she said,—'for,' hesitating with her Scotch shyness, 'for love!'

'For love!' Mrs. Hayward echoed the word with a tone of opposition, and almost offence. 'She is one of the women who seem to have the gift of attracting girls. I don't know how they do it, for girls have always seemed to me the most uncertain, unappreciative——' She sighed impatiently, then added in a softened tone, 'If it's only a sort of pet name, that's different. But you must see that it is your duty to avoid everything that could seem to—to discredit your father. And we can't explain the circumstances to everybody, and prove that it was not his fault. For my part,' she cried, with a flash of quick feeling in her clear eyes, 'I'd say anything or do anything rather than let it be supposed for a moment that the Colonel—had anything to be ashamed of in the whole course of his existence. He has not, and never had, whatever you may think. That's what I call love,' she cried, vehemently, with a sudden tear or two taking her by surprise.

Joyce turned towards her step-mother with a quick responsive look; but Mrs. Hayward was ashamed of her own emotion, and had turned away to conceal it, thus missing the eager overture of

sympathy. She went on in another moment with a little laugh : 'It shows we never should be sure of anything. If there was one thing more unlikely than another, I should have said it was the gossip of a Scotch village getting abroad here. I should have thought that nobody here had ever heard the name of Bellendean —when lo! it turns out that we are in a perfect wasp's nest of relations and connections. Your Miss Greta, as you call her, a cousin, and the St. Clairs themselves visitors of the Bellendeans. I suppose before another week is over all Richmond will know the story. It is very vexatious, when I had planned to take you about everywhere, and do all sorts of things !'

She was called out of the room at this moment by some domestic requirement, and did not hear Joyce's troubled murmur. 'Was there anything, then, to think shame of?' Joyce had said, her voice trembling, with the Scotch idiom which Mrs. Hayward disliked. She added to herself, 'in me,' with a wondering pang. Perhaps the girl had too high a conception of herself, which it was well to bring down; but such an operation is always a painful one. Though she had been brought up in a ploughman's cottage, and occupied the humblest position, yet nothing had ever happened in her life to humiliate Joyce. She had been admired and praised, and placed upon a little pedestal from her earliest consciousness : and that any one should be ashamed of her struck her as something so incredible and extraordinary, that it took away her breath,—'anything to think shame of—in me.' She had no defence against such a sudden dart : it went through and through her, cutting to her heart. She rose up quickly, with a sensation intolerable—a quick and passionate impulse. To do what? She could not tell. To have the wings of a dove and fly away—but where? She stopped herself, clasping her hands together, holding herself fast that she might not be so unreasonable as to do it. The mother had done it, and what had come of it? To herself madness and death, and to her poor child this,—that the people to whom she belonged were ashamed of her—ashamed of Joyce! It seemed a thing impossible, not to be realised. She said it over to herself incredulously, making an effort to smile. Ashamed!—but no, no! Whatever there was to bear, it must be borne, even though those wings for which so many have sighed should be given to her : she must not fly, she must stay.

But Joyce had in this particular still something more hard to bear. A few days after the visit of the captain, Mrs. Bellendean came to Richmond, bringing with her Greta. The two ladies came with a purpose. They had been warned by Captain Bellen-

dean that there were difficulties in the Colonel's household, and that Joyce's position was not of the happiest. How he had divined that much it would be difficult to say, for divination was not Norman's *forte*. But for once his sympathy or interest had given insight to his eyes.

'You should go and let them see that the poor girl has friends,' he said.

'I shall go,' said Mrs. Bellendean, who was very sure that she must know better than Norman, 'and make myself very agreeable to the step-mother. She is not a bad sort of woman. She will be pleased if we go and call at once, and I confess I shall do everything I know to make her like me and trust me: that will be the best way of serving Joyce.' With this intent the ladies arrived and played their part very prettily. They were delighted with the house, the drawing-room, the lovely things, Indian and otherwise, admiring them with a comprehension and knowledge which Joyce had not possessed, and making Mrs. Hayward glow with gratification and modest pride. Joyce followed her beloved lady with her looks,—her usual and faithful admiration of everything Mrs. Bellendean said and did very slightly modified by surprise at this new aspect of her. They had not failed in any mark of affection to herself—nay, had startled her by the warmth of their greetings. Mrs. Bellendean had met her with outstretched arms and a kiss which confused Joyce with pleasure, and afterwards with—something else, which was not so agreeable. Joyce, indeed, was the one silent in the midst of the effusive cordiality and pleasantness of this meeting. She did not know how to respond or what to say. It was the first time she had met her friends under this new aspect. The night she had spent at Bellendean before leaving had been different. She was then in all the excitement of the great revolution in her life, and nothing seemed too extraordinary for that crisis; but Joyce had calmed down, she had returned to life's ordinary, though with so amazing a difference—and her lady's kiss and Greta's eager outstretched arms overwhelmed her with doubts and questions which half blotted out the pleasure.

Finally, they strayed out upon the lawn, and down the shaded walk towards the river, as all visitors did. Joyce had made that little pilgrimage only in company with Captain Bellendean as yet; and there did not fail to pass through her mind a comparison which affected her in a way she did not understand. She knew him so much less than Greta, cared for him much less—and yet——Joyce fled from the faint rising of an uncomprehended thought

with a thrill of strange alarm, and turned to her friend, who was so sweet, the admired of all her youthful thoughts, her little paragon of prettiness and sweetness. Greta had twined her arm within her companion's, and was looking tenderly into her face.

'And are you happy?' Greta said. 'Oh, Joyce! I remember how you used to fancy all manner of things. You would not have been surprised if you had turned out to be a princess—like Queen Mary's daughter, who was "unknown to history."'

'If there ever was such a person,' said schoolmistress Joyce. 'Yes, I think I was quite prepared to be a princess.'

'It would have been much more troublesome than this, and not half so nice, I think. To have had that horrible Bothwell for a father, or some one else as dreadful, instead of delightful Colonel Hayward.'

'My father,' said Joyce, with a little flush and stir of feeling which was always called forth by his name, 'is better—than anything I ever could have dreamed.'

'Then why are you not happy?' cried Greta, going direct to the heart of the matter, as children do.

'But perhaps I am happy,' said Joyce, with a little sigh, followed by a smile. 'To be happy is a strange thing: it is not at your own will, nor because you are well off, and have everything you can want. It is just for nothing, and comes when it pleases. And life is very confusing. There are so many things to think of that I never thought of before. How to please them—and I always used to please, just because it was me. And sometimes I think they are ashamed.'

'Ashamed, Joyce!'

'No,' she said, 'not of me, as me: but because of what I was. You used all to say pretty things to me, Miss Greta, about the fine work I was doing,—about the use I was to the children—even to the country,' Joyce added, with a light in her eyes.

'Miss Greta, Joyce! is that like the friends we are? I shall call you Miss Hayward if you say that again.'

Joyce turned upon her with a sudden flash, raising her head with an involuntary movement that looked like disdain. 'See now,' she said, 'you yourself! You never said *that* when I was Joyce Matheson, the schoolmistress at Bellendean. And yet you all praised me, and said I was doing a good work. I am doing no work nor anything here. I am just a cumberer of the ground. They don't know what to do with me, though they want to be very kind. And I don't know what to do with myself. But you never said *that* to me in the old time.'

'Oh, Joyce!' cried Greta, with conviction and shame. She added, holding her companion's arm close, 'Not that I didn't want to say it—many and many a time! You were always much better, much higher than I.'

Joyce put her hand upon her friend's, but shook her head, her cheeks flushed with a transient glow of feeling, her eyes troubled and unconvinced. 'We'll say nothing about that. It was all as it ought to be, and natural: anything else would have been out of place both for you and me. But you did not then; and now you would have me in a moment change, and say Miss Greta no more, because I am no longer the schoolmistress, but Colonel Hayward's daughter. But how can I do that? that would mean a change in me. And there is no change in me.'

Greta did not understand what was in her friend's face. Joyce no longer looked at her, but away into the blue distance over the river among the tufts and clusters of the soft English trees—looking but seeing not; perceiving only the mists and confusion of a change with which her own will and thoughts had nothing to do, against which she could not help rebelling, though she was compelled to acknowledge that it was all natural, inevitable, not to be resisted. It wounded her native sense of dignity to be thus elevated, to have a position given to her, even in the hearts of her friends, which had not been hers before. Mrs. Bellendean's kiss, and Greta's eager affection, what were they to the real Joyce, to whom both had been so kind, so friendly, even tender, but never with this demonstration of equality? If Joyce had been embittered, she would have considered them insults to her old and true self; but she was not bitter. She was only humiliated, strangely wounded, and astray, seeing the necessity of it, and the hardness of it, and only feeling in her heart the absence of any place for her, herself, the true Joyce, who had never changed amid all these strange alterations. She put her hand upon that which was trembling yet clinging fast to her arm, and softly patted it, with something of the feeling of the elder to the younger, the superior to the inferior—which was a change too, though Joyce was scarcely cognisant of it; for in her unawakened days she had looked up with genuine faith to Miss Greta, making a little ideal of her. Now, though Joyce did not know it, that balance had turned too, and she was keenly perceiving, pardoning, excusing that in which her ideal had failed. 'I could have wished,' she said, '*you* had not done it. I could have wished that *we* should bide—as we always were—just you you, and me me.'

'Oh, Joyce!' faltered Greta, clinging more and more. 'I have

been so glad that you and I could be like sisters—as I have always felt.’

‘You and—Colonel’s Hayward’s daughter, Miss Greta,’ she said.

By this time the two elder ladies had followed to the water’s edge, and stood looking up the Thames at the sweeping willows, and the spot, which none of them cared the least about, where the poet’s villa had been planted. Mrs. Bellendean, who was very quick in observation, saw that Greta was disturbed, and came up, laying her hand on Joyce’s shoulder. ‘Let me have her a little now,’ she said. ‘Norman told us about your river-side, Joyce, and how you had showed him everything. He could talk of nothing else when he came back.’

‘It was a beautiful day—which was all that is wanted; for you see yourself there is not much to show.’

‘And you,’ said Mrs. Bellendean, ‘who were the first thing to be taken into consideration, perhaps. Joyce, I want to speak to you, my dear. Your—yes, I know, she is not your mother; but she wants to be as kind as you will let her. She is troubled about all this story being known.’

‘All what story?’ said Joyce, with a catching of her breath.

‘Oh, my dear, you know. And I don’t wonder at it. You were a miracle in your own—I mean in that position. But now it is very natural your parents should wish—no more to be said about it than is necessary. Mrs. Hayward says very truly that it is better a girl shouldn’t be talked about, even when it is all to her credit. She wanted to warn *me*,’ Mrs. Bellendean said, with a smile at the ignorance thus manifested. She had put her arm into that of Joyce, and led her along the velvet turf, as far as the lawn extended, leaving Greta with Mrs. Hayward. ‘As if I were likely to betray you! But I want you to promise, Joyce, that you won’t—betray yourself, which is far more likely.’

‘Betray!’ cried Joyce. She had been humiliated by Greta; she was indignant now. ‘What have I to betray?’ she cried; ‘that I am a waif, and a foundling, and an abandoned creature that belongs to nobody? or that I am a trouble and a charge to everybody that has to do with me, breaking my poor Granny’s heart because she wants me, and a shame to the others that don’t want me? Myself! what is it to betray myself? Oh, you are kind; you are very kind. You were my dear lady that I honoured above everything. But you kiss me to-day because I’m—not Joyce, but Colonel Hayward’s daughter; and you bid me not to betray myself. To betray that I am myself—is that what you mean?’

‘Joyce ! Joyce !’ cried Mrs. Bellendean.

Joyce paused for a moment to dry the sudden tears which had betrayed her, coming with a rush to her eyes—girls being such poor creatures, that cannot do anything or feel anything without crying ! She had drawn her arm out of her friend’s arm, and her eyes were shining, and a swift nervous movement, scarcely restrainable, thrilling through her. That impulse, as of a hunted deer, to give one momentary glance round, and then turn and fly—the impulse of her mother, which was in all Joyce’s veins, though nothing had occurred till now to bring it out,—took hold upon her, and shook her like a sudden wind. She knew what it was, though, no one else had any warning of it ; and it frightened her to the depths of her soul.

CHAPTER XXII

NOTWITHSTANDING this sense of outrage and injury, time and the hour had their usual effect upon Joyce. There are few things that the common strain of everyday does not subdue in time—few things, that is, that are of the nature of sentiment, not actual evil or wrong. She reconciled herself to the affectionate demonstrations of her old friends, which were such as they had not made in the old times, without at least saying again that these were for Colonel Hayward's daughter, and not for Joyce; and she learnt to make new ones, or at least to receive shyly and respond as much as her nature permitted to the overtures of acquaintanceship made to her by the society among which she lived. The sense of strangeness faded away; she became familiar with her surroundings, and with the things which were required of her. She acquired, to her astonishment and amusement, and pleasure too, when she had become a little accustomed to her own appearance in them, a number of new dresses and ornaments, the latter chiefly presents from her father, who found it the most delightful amusement to make a little expedition into town—a thing which was at all times a pleasant diversion to him—to go to Hancock's, or some other costly place, before or after he went to his club, and bring Joyce a bracelet or a ring. These expeditions were not always agreeable to Mrs. Hayward. She said, 'If you would tell me what you wanted, Henry, I could get it a great deal cheaper for you at the Stores—half the price: these Hancock people are ruinous.'

'But, my dear, I bought it only because it chanced to take my fancy—in the shop-window,' said the scheming Colonel, with wiles which he had learned of recent days. His wife knew as well as he did that this little fable was of doubtful credence, but she said no more. After all, if he could not give his child a bracelet or two, it would be a strange thing, Mrs. Hayward said

to herself with a little heat. She was determined to be reasonable, but she could not help being slightly suspicious of his meaning, when he announced his intention at the breakfast-table of taking a little run up to town, and seeing how those fellows were getting on. He meant his old cronies at the club, whom he was always pleased to see; but it always turned out that there were other little things to be done as well.

And Joyce was far from being without pleasure in these pretty presents, and in the tenderness which beamed from the Colonel's face, when he stole his little packet out of his pocket with the air of a schoolboy bringing home a bird's nest. 'My dear, I happened to see this as I passed, and I thought you would like it.' She did not know much about the value of these gifts, overestimating it at first, underrating it afterwards—and cared very little, to tell the truth, after the first sensation of awe with which she had regarded the gold and precious stones, when she found such unexpected treasures in her own possession. But what was of far greater importance was the tender bond which, by means of all the kind thoughts which resulted in these gifts, and the grateful and pleased sentiment which these kind thoughts called forth, grew up between the Colonel and his daughter. She became the companion of a morning walk which up to this time he had been in the habit of taking alone—Mrs. Hayward considering it necessary to be 'on the spot,' as she said, and looking after her household. The Colonel, who never liked to be alone, took advantage one lovely morning of a chance meeting with Joyce, who was straying somewhat listlessly along the shrubby walk, thinking of many things. 'I am going for my walk,' he said—his walk being a habit as regular as the nursery performance of the same kind. 'If you have nothing to do, get your hat and come with me, my dear.' And this walk came to be delightful to both, Joyce making acquaintance thereby with those genuine reflections of a mind uninstructed save by life, which are so often full of insight and interest; while the Colonel on his side listened with delighted admiration to Joyce's information on all kinds of subjects, which was drawn entirely from books. He talked to her about India and his old friends there and all their histories, enchanted to rouse her interest and to have to stir up his memory in order to satisfy her as to how an incident ended, or what became of a man.

'What happened after? My dear, I believe he was killed at Delhi, poor fellow!—after all they had gone through. Yes, it was hard: but that's a soldier's life, you know; he never knows where he may have to leave his bones. The poor little woman

had to be sent home. We got up some money for her, and I believe she had friends to whom she went with her baby. That's all I know about them. As for Brown, he got on very well—retired now with the rank of a general, and lives at Cheltenham. The last time I saw him, he was at Woolwich with his third boy for an exam. It is either the one thing or the other, Joyce—either they get killed young, or they live through everything and come home, regular old *vieux moustaches*, as the French say, with immense families to set out in the world. The number of fine fellows I've seen drop! and then the number of others who survive everything, and are not so much the better for it after all.'

'When I read the vision of Mirza to my old granny at home——at Bellendean—she said life was like that,' said Joyce gravely,—'some dropping suddenly in a moment, so that you only saw that they had disappeared.'

'The vision of—— what, my dear? It has an Eastern sound, but I don't think it's in the Bible. Very likely I've heard it somewhere: but my memory is rather bad'—(he had been giving her a hundred personal details of all kinds of people, in the range of some thirty or forty years)—'especially for books.' Colonel Hayward added, 'More shame to me,' with a shake of his grey head.

And then she told him Mirza's vision, with the warm natural eloquence of her inexperience and profound conviction that literature was the one deathless and universal influence. The Colonel was greatly pleased with it, and received it as the most original of allegories. 'It's wonderful,' he said, 'what imagination these Eastern chaps have, Joyce. They carry it too far, you know, calling you the emperor's brother, the flower of all the warriors of the West, and that sort of thing, which is nonsense, and never after the first time takes in the veriest Johnny Raw of a young ensign. Well, but your old woman was very right, my dear. If I were to tell you about all the fellows that started in life with me—such a lot of them, Joyce; as cheery a set—not so clever, perhaps, as the new men nowadays, but up to anything—it's very like that old humbug's bridge, which, between you and me, never existed, you know—you may be quite sure of that.'

Joyce held her breath when she heard the beloved Addison called an old humbug, but reflected that the Colonel did not mean it, and made no remark.

'It is very like that,' he continued musingly. 'One doesn't even notice at the time—but when you look back. There was Jack Hunter went almost as soon as we landed: such a nice

fellow—I seem to hear his laugh now, though I haven't so much as thought upon him for forty years,—dropped, you know, without ever hearing a shot fired, with the laugh in his mouth, so to speak. And Jim Jenkinson, the first time we were under fire, in a bit of a skirmish for no use. His brother, though—by George! he hasn't dropped at all; for here he comes, as tough an old parson as ever lived, Joyce. Excuse the exclamation, my dear. It slips out, though I hate swearing as much as you can do. We'll have to stop and speak to Canon Jenkinson. I think, on the whole, rather than grow into such a pursy parson, I'd rather have dropped like poor Jim.'

Colonel Hayward directed his daughter's attention to a large clergyman, who was walking along on the other side of the road. The Colonel had the contempt of all slim men for all fat ones; and Joyce, too, being imaginative and young, looked with sympathetic disapproval at the rotundity which was approaching. Canon Jenkinson was more than a fat man—he was a fat clergyman. His black waistcoat was tightly, but with many wrinkles, strained across a protuberance which is often anything but amusing to the unfortunate individual who has to carry it, but which invariably arouses the smiles of unfeeling spectators; the long lapels of his black coat swung on either side as he moved quickly with a step very light for such a weight—swinging, too, a neatly rolled umbrella, which he carried horizontally like a balance to keep his arm extended to its full length. When he saw Colonel Hayward he crossed the road towards him, with a larger swing still of his great person altogether. 'Halloa, Hayward!' he said, in a big, rolling, bass voice.

'Well, Canon; I am glad to see you have come back.'

'And what is this you have been about in my absence, my good fellow,—increasing and multiplying at a time of life when I should have thought you beyond all such vanities? Is this the young lady? As a very old friend of your father's, Miss Hayward, and as he doesn't say a word to help us, I must introduce myself.'

He held out a large hand in which Joyce's timid one was for a moment buried, and then he said, 'You've hidden her away a long time, Hayward, and kept her dark; but I've always remarked of you that when you did produce a thing at the last, it was worth the trouble. My wife told me you had sprung a family upon us. No story was ever diminished by being retold.'

'No, no, my daughter only—Joyce, who has been brought up by—her mother's relations—in Scotland.' The Colonel had

learned his lesson, but he said it with a little hesitation and faltering.

'Oh!' said the clergyman, and then he added in an undertone, 'Your first poor wife, I suppose?'

The Colonel replied only by a nod, while Joyce stood embarrassed and half indignant. She was deeply vexed by the interrogatory of which she was the subject, and still more by her father's look and tone. For the poor Colonel was the last person in the world to be trusted with the utterance of a fiction, and his looks contradicted the words which he managed to say.

'Ah!' said Canon Jenkinson: and then he turned suddenly upon Joyce. 'Are you a good Churchwoman, or are you a little Presbyterian?' he said. 'I must have that out with you before we are much older. And I hear you are going to range yourself on the side of Sitwell, and help him to defy me. His school feast, *par exemple*, when I am having the whole parish three or four days after! You know a good deal of the insubordination of subalterns, Hayward, but you don't know what the incumbent of a district can do when he tries. He is not your curate, so you can't squash him. Miss Hayward, I take it amiss of you that you should have gone over to Sitwell's side.'

'I don't know even the gentleman's name,' said Joyce. 'There was somebody spoke of his schools—and I am very fond of schools.'

'His schools! You shall come and see the parish schools, and tell me what you think of them. Don't take a wretched little district as an example. I'll tell you what, Hayward,—she shall come with me at once and see what we can do. I don't go touting round for unpaid curates, as Sitwell does. But I do think a nice woman's the best of school inspectors—in an unofficial way, *bien entendu*. I don't mean to propose you to the Government, Miss Hayward, to get an appointment, when there are so much too few for the men.'

He spoke with a swing, too, of such fluent talk, rolling out in the deep, round, agreeable bass which was so well known in the neighbourhood, that the two helpless persons thus caught were almost carried away by the stream.

'I don't think she can go now, Jenkinson. Elizabeth will be wondering already what has become of us.'

'Is that so?' said the Canon, with a laugh. 'We all know there's no going against the commanding officer. Another time, then—another time. But, Miss Hayward, you must give me

your promise not to let yourself be prejudiced ; and, above all, don't go over to Sitwell's side.'

He pressed her hand in his, gave her a beaming smile, waved his hand to the Colonel, and swung along upon his way, exchanging greetings with everybody he encountered.

'My dear,' said Colonel Hayward, 'there is no telling what that man might have plunged you into if I had not been here to defend you. Let us go home lest something worse befall us. I think I see the Sitwells coming up Grove Road. If you should fall into their hands, I know not what would happen. Walk quickly, and perhaps they will not see us. Elizabeth will say I am not fit to be trusted with you if I let you be torn to pieces by the clergy. The Canon, you see, Joyce, was the means of having this new district church set up. And Sitwell has not behaved prudently—not at all prudently. He has played his cards badly. He has taken up the opposition party—those that were always against the Canon, whatever he might do. They are good people, and mean well, but—— Oh, Mrs. Sitwell ! I am sure I beg your pardon. I never imagined it was you.'

There had been a quick little pattering of feet behind them, and Mrs. Sitwell, out of breath, panting out inquiries after their health and the health of dear Mrs. Hayward, captured the reluctant pair. She was a small woman, as light as a feather, and full of energy. She took Joyce by both her hands. 'Oh, dear Miss Hayward !' she cried, breathless, 'I ran after you to tell you about the school feast. I hope you don't forget your promise. Austin's coming after me—he'll be here directly, but I ran to tell you. To-morrow afternoon in Wombwell's field. Colonel Hayward, you'll bring her, won't you ? I know you like to see the poor little children enjoying themselves.'

'My dear lady,' said the Colonel, 'I am distressed to see you so out of breath.'

'Oh, that's nothing. There's no harm done,' said Mrs. Sitwell. 'I am always running about. Here is Austin to back me up. He will tell you how I have been calculating upon you, Miss Hayward. Dear, don't pant, but tell her. I have told every one you were coming. Oh, don't disappoint me—don't, don't !'

'I can't help panting,' said the clergyman ; 'it is my usual state. I am always running after my wife. But, Miss Hayward, it is quite true. We want you very much, and she has quite set her heart upon it. I do hope you will come—as I think you said.'

Mrs. Sitwell left Joyce no time to reply. 'You must, you

must, indeed,' she said. 'Ah, Colonel Hayward, I saw what you did. You brought down the Great Gun upon her. Was that fair? when we had been so fortunate as to see her first, and when she had begun to take to us. And whatever he may say, you are in our district. Of course the parish includes everything. I think that man would like to have all England in his parish—all the best people. He would not mind leaving us the poor.'

'Hush, Dora,' said her husband. 'I don't wonder you should form a strong opinion: but we must not say what is against Christian charity.'

'Oh, charity!' cried the clergyman's wife; 'I think *he* should begin. I am sure he told Miss Hayward that she was to have nothing to do with us. Now, didn't he? I can read it in your face. Austin himself, though he pretends to be so charitable, said to me when we saw him talking, "Now you may give up all hopes;" but I said, No; I had more opinion of your face than that. I knew you would stick to your first friends and hold by your word.'

'You ought to be warned, Miss Hayward,' said the Rev. Austin Sitwell; 'my wife's quite a dangerous person. She professes to know all about you if she only sees your photograph—much more when she has the chance of reading your face.'

'Don't betray me, you horrid tell-tale,' said his wife, threatening him with a little finger. There was a hole in the glove which covered this small member, which Joyce could not but notice as it was held up; and this curious colloquy held across her bewildered her so much, that she had scarcely time to be amused by it. For one thing, there was no need for her to reply. 'But I do know the language of the face,' said Mrs. Sitwell. 'I don't know how I do it, it is just a gift. And I know Miss Hayward is true. Wombwell's field at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon. You won't fail me! Colonel Hayward, you'll bring her, now won't you? or it will quite break my heart.'

'Sooner than do that, my dear lady,' said the Colonel, with his hat in his hand—

'Ah, you laugh—you all laugh; you don't think what it is to a poor little woman trying to do her best. Good-bye, then, good-bye till to-morrow—Wombwell's field. I shall quite calculate on seeing you. My love to dear Mrs. Hayward. Tell her we got the cakes this morning—such lovely cakes. I shall keep a piece for my own chicks. Good-bye, good-bye.'

'Thank heaven, Joyce, my dear,' said the Colonel piously, 'we have got away without any pledge. If Elizabeth had only been

there ! but I don't think she is very sure herself which side she is on. The Canon is the head of the parish, to be sure, and a sort of an old friend besides ; but these young people take a great deal of trouble. And we were all instrumental in getting this new church built, so I think we ought to stand by them. But, thank goodness, we neither said one thing nor another. So we can't be blamed, my dear, neither you nor I.'

CHAPTER XXIII

As it turned out, they all went to the school feast.

Mrs. Hayward was not quite sure, as the Colonel had said, which side she was on. The Canon had a great influence over her, as he had over most of the ladies in the parish ; but the Canon had a way of making jokes about India and her husband's youth, which were apt to turn Mrs. Hayward sharply round to the other side. When the Colonel reported to her all that happened, and the meeting in the road, and Canon Jenkinson's questions, Elizabeth's suspicions were at once aroused. 'What did you tell him?' she said.

'I said exactly what you told me, my dear. I don't quite approve of it—but I wouldn't run the risk of contradicting you——'

'And what did he say?'

'Well, my dear,' said Colonel Hayward, a little flushed by this rapid questioning, 'he said something about "your first poor wife"—which was quite natural—for he knows that we have no——'

'Yes, yes,' Mrs. Hayward cried indignantly. 'I knew he was just the man to make references of that sort.' And after a few minutes she added, 'I think we'll go to the school feast. It will please the Sitwells, who have a great many difficulties, and who do the very best they can for their people ; and it will show the Canon——'

'But I assure you, my dear——'

'You have no occasion to assure me of anything, Henry—I hope I know him well enough. He is just the sort of man,' Mrs. Hayward said. And on the next afternoon she dressed very well indeed, as for one of the best of her afternoon parties, and went to the school feast. To see her going in at the swinging-gate, with Joyce and the Colonel following in her train, was a very fine sight. But the group was not so conspicuous as it might have been, from

the fact that a great many people equally fine had already gathered in Wombwell's field, where the Sitwells, though they were poor, had gone to the expense of having a tent put up,—an extravagance which the people who shared their humble hospitalities did not forget for many a long day. It was not a school feast only, but a demonstration of the faction of St. Augustine's as against the parish. Mrs. Sitwell had worked for this great end with an energy worthy of the best of causes. She had not neglected any inducements. 'The Haywards are coming,' she said, 'with their daughter, you know,—the young lady whom no one ever heard of before. I am sure there is some mystery about that daughter.' This was how it was that she had been so anxious and importunate with Joyce.

It was the very first occasion on which Joyce had found herself among a company of ladies and gentlemen as one of themselves, and she had not at all expected it. She had gone expecting to find children, among whom she was always at home,—poor children who, though they would be English, and talk with that accent which, to Joyce's unaccustomed ears, meant refinement almost as extraordinary as the strange acquirement of speaking French, which continues to astonish unaccustomed travellers on the other side of the Channel—would still be not so much unlike Scotch children that one used to them should not find means of making friends. She had made sure that there would be some young woman in charge of them with whom, perhaps, she might be allowed to make acquaintance, who would tell her how she managed, and what were her difficulties, and which was the way approved in England. In short, Joyce had looked forward wistfully to a momentary half-clandestine return to what had heretofore been her life. It was disappointing to go in company with her father and his wife, who would be on the outlook to see that she did not commit herself. But then, on the other hand, she was unexpectedly reinforced by the arrival of Captain Bellen-dean, in whom she found a curious support and consolation. He knew—that she was Joyce the schoolmistress, not a fine young lady. That of itself felt like a backing up—just as it had been a backing up in the old times that the lady at Bellendean knew that perhaps she was not altogether Joyce the schoolmistress, but Joyce the princess, Lady Joyce, if all were known.

But when Joyce found herself in the midst of this well-dressed company, and understood that she was, so to speak, quite accidentally plunged into the world, a great tremor came over her. The scene was very animated and pretty, though not exactly what it

professed to be. Wombwell's field was a large grassy space, very green and open, surrounded on three sides by overhanging foliage, and with a few trees at the upper end, where the ground sloped a little. In the flat ground at the bottom the travelling menageries which visited Richmond were in the habit of establishing themselves from time to time, whence its name. The round spot created by innumerable circuses showed upon the grass; but beyond the turf was of unbroken greenness, and there stood the little tent within which tea was dispensed to the company. The children were at the other end of the field occupied with divers games, with a few of the faithful of the district superintending and inspiring. But Joyce found herself not in that division of the entertainment, where she might have been at her ease, but in the midst of all the well-dressed people—the people who knew each other, and exchanged greetings and smiles and polite conversation.

'Dear Mrs. Hayward, how kind of you to come to our little treat! Dear Miss Hayward, how sweet of you to remember! Colonel, you are always so kind; I am sure you have been working for me,' cried Mrs. Sitwell, meeting them with extended hands. She was beaming with smiles and delight. 'I asked a few friends to look in, and people are so kind, everybody has come. It is quite an ovation! Dear Austin is quite overcome. It is such an encouragement in the face of opposition to find his friends rallying round him like this.'

'Why are his friends rallying round him?' said Captain Bellen-dean. 'I thought it was a school feast.'

'And so did I,' said Joyce, looking somewhat piteously round her, and wistfully at the children in the distance. The Colonel and Mrs. Hayward had both been swallowed up by the crowd. They were shaking hands with all their acquaintances, exchanging smiles and remarks. Joyce said to herself, with a thrill of mingled alarm and self-congratulation, What should I have done had not the Captain been here?

Norman looked round upon the company, though with different feelings from those of Joyce. 'I don't know a soul,' he said, with a little amusement—the consciousness, so soon acquired by a man who has been for however short a time 'in society'—not only that it is a very extraordinary thing to know nobody, but also that the people among whom he cannot find a single acquaintance cannot be of much account.

'And neither do I,' said Joyce, with a wistful look. Her feeling was very different. She was a little fluttered by the sight of so many people, and looked at them with a longing to see a face

she knew, a face which would smile upon her. She met many looks, and could even see that there were little scraps of conversation about her, and that she was pointed out to one and another; but there was no greeting or recognition for her among the pleasant crowd. She turned round again, very grateful, to the Captain, whose society sustained her—but, alas! the Captain had been spied and seized upon by Lady St. Clair, and Joyce felt herself left alone. She looked wistfully at the collection of daughters who surrounded Lady St. Clair, ready to claim acquaintance with a smile if the Miss St. Clair who had called should be among the array. But either the Miss St. Clair who had called was not there; or else she had forgotten Joyce. She stood for a moment shy yet desolate, not knowing where to turn; then, with a little sense of taking flight, moved quickly away to where the children were.

‘Miss Hayward, Miss Hayward!’ cried a voice behind. She paused, glad that some one cared enough to stop her, and saw Mr. Sitwell hastening after her, with a young man following closely,—a very young man in the long coat and close waistcoat which were quite unusual things to Joyce. ‘You are so kind as *really* to wish to help with the children? Let me introduce my young friend and curate, Mr. Bright; he will take you to them,’ the clergyman said.

The other little clergyman made his bow, and said how fortunate they were in having such a fine day, and what a pretty party it was. ‘I always think this is such a nice place for outdoor parties: not so nice as one’s own lawn, of course—but if one has no lawn, what can one do? In most places there is no alternative but a vulgar field. Now this is quite pretty—don’t you think it is quite pretty, Miss Hayward?’

‘There is so much green, and such fine trees, that everything here is pretty,’ said Joyce.

‘You put it much more nicely than I did; but I’m so glad you like the place; and how very gratifying for the Sitwells! It really was time that there should be a demonstration. After beguiling Sitwell here with such large promises, to have the rectory set itself against him! But there is a generosity about society, don’t you think, Miss Hayward, as soon as people really see the state of affairs. It will be a dreadful slap in the face for Jenkinson, don’t you think?’

‘Indeed——’ Joyce had begun, meaning to say she was too ignorant to form an opinion, but her new companion did not wait for the expression of her sentiments.

‘Yes, indeed—you are quite right; and for Mrs. Jenkinson,

who, between ourselves, is a great deal worse than the Canon. Every one who comes to St. Augustine's she seems to think is taking away something from her. That is the greatest testimonial we can give to the ladies,' said the little gentleman, with a laugh; 'when they are disagreeable, they are so very disagreeable—beyond the power of any man. But, fortunately for us, that happens very seldom.' The curate glanced up for the smile of approval with which his little sallies were generally received, but getting none, went on again undismayed. 'Which kind of children do you like, Miss Hayward,—the quite little ones, the roly-polies, or the big ones? I prefer the babies myself: they roll about on the grass like puppies, and they are quite happy—whereas you have to keep the other ones going. Miss Marsham takes the big girls in hand. You must let me introduce her to you. She is our great stand-by in the district—a little peculiar, but such a good creature. Well, Miss Marsham, how are you getting on here?'

'Very well, oh, very well. We always do nicely. We have been playing at Tom Tidler's ground. We just wanted some one to take the head of the other side. Oh, Mr. Bright,' cried this new personage, clasping her hands together, 'what a pleasure for everybody; what a good thing; what a thorough success!'

'Isn't it?' cried the curate; and they both turned round to look down upon the many-coloured groups below with beaming faces.

'Nobody can say now that St. Augustine's was not wanted,' said the lady.

'No, indeed; I have just been saying to Miss Hayward what a slap in the face for the Canon,' the gentleman added, again giving vent to his feelings in a triumphant laugh.

'Oh, is this Miss Hayward?' said Miss Marsham, offering her hand to Joyce. She was a thin woman, with long meagre arms, and hands thrust into gloves too big for her. Without being badly dressed, she had the general air of having been taken out of a wardrobe of old clothes: everything she wore being a little old-fashioned, a little odd, badly matched, and hanging unharmoniously together. Even those gloves, which were too big, had the air of having had two hands thrust into them at random, without any thought whether or not they were a pair. But the old clothes were all of good quality; the little frills of lace were what ladies call 'real,' not the cottony imitations which are current in the present day. She had a worn face, lit up by a pair of soft brown eyes, in which there was still a great deal of sparkle left, when their owner pleased.

'I have heard so much of you,' she said. 'Dear Mrs. Sitwell takes such an interest! it is so very kind to come and see how the children are getting on: and here they are all waiting for their game. Mr. Bright, you must take the other side. Now then, children, I hope that is high enough for you. Come on.'

Joyce stood by with great gravity while the game proceeded—Mr. Bright and Miss Marsham making an arch with their joined hands, through which the children streamed. The curate, no doubt, would have taken this part of his duties quite simply if it had not been for the presence of this spectator, whose momentary smile died off into a look of very serious contemplation as she stood by, taking no part in the fun, which, with the stimulus of Mr. Bright's presence, grew fast and furious. Joyce could not have told why she felt so serious. She stood looking on at Miss Marsham's old clothes on the one side—the thin wrist, with its little edge of yellow lace, the big glove, made doubly visible by the elevation of the hand—and Mr. Bright in his neat coat, falling to his knee, extremely spruce in his professional blackness, against the vivid green of the sloping field. Joyce thought him very good to do it, nor was she conscious of any ridicule. She compared Mr. Bright with the minister at home, who would have looked on as she herself was doing, but certainly would not have joined in the play: and she thought that the children were very much made of in England, and should be very happy. Presently, however, Mr. Bright detached himself from the game, and came and joined her.

'I am afraid you thought me a great gaby,' he said; 'but at a school feast, you know, one can't stand on one's dignity.'

'Oh no,' said Joyce, 'it was I that was the great—— for not joining in. I should like to do something; but I don't know what would please them.'

'Something new to play at,' said Miss Marsham. 'I always ask strangers if they can't recommend something new. Look, look!' she cried, suddenly clutching the curate's arm; 'do you see? the Thompsons' carriage, his very greatest supporters! Dear me, dear me! who could have thought of that!'

'And Sir Sam himself,' said the curate exultantly. 'Well, this is triumph indeed. I must go and see what they say.'

'Sir Sam himself,' said Miss Marsham musingly. 'Do you know, Miss Hayward, if you will not think it strange of me to say it, I am beginning to get a little sorry for the Canon.' It is not that Sir Sam is such a great person. He is only a soap-boiler, or something of that sort; but he is enormously rich, and the

Canon has always been by way of having him in his pocket. Whatever was wanted, there was always a big subscription from Sir Sam. Yes, dear, by all means. Hunt the Slipper is a very nice, noisy—— You will think it very queer, Miss Hayward, but I *am* beginning to get sorry for the Canon. I can't help recollecting, you know, the time before St. Augustine's was thought of. Yes, yes, my dear; but let me talk for a moment to the young lady.'

'I know so little,' said Joyce,—'scarcely either the one or the other.'

'And you must think us so frivolous,' said the kind woman, with a sigh. 'The fact is, I was very anxious it should be a success. St. Augustine's was very much wanted—it really was. There are such a number of those people that live by the river, you know—boatmen, and those sort of people—and so neglected. I tried a few things—a night-school, and so forth; but by one's self one can do so little. Have you much experience, Miss Hayward, in parish work?'

'Oh, none—none at all.'

'Ah!' said Miss Marsham, with a sigh, 'that's how one's illusions go. I thought you would be such a help. But never mind, my dear, you're very young. Oh, you've begun, children, without me! All right, all right; I am not disappointed at all. I want to talk to this young lady. They think we care for it just as much as they do,' she went on turning to Joyce; 'but if truth be told, I am a little stiff for Hunt the Slipper. And you can't think how good the Sitwells are. He is in the parish—I ought to say the district—morning, noon, and night. And she—well, if I did not know she had three children, and did everything for them herself, and really only one servant, for the other is quite a girl, and always taken up with the baby—besides her work about the photographs, you know—I should say she was in the parish too, morning, noon, and night.'

Joyce stood and looked down upon the people flitting in and out of the tent, arranging and rearranging themselves in different groups, and on the rush of the hosts to the swinging-gate, at which a fat man and a large lady were getting down, and listened to the narrative going on in her ear with the accompaniment of the cries and laughter of the children, all in that tone which, to her northern ears, was high-pitched and a little shrill. How strange it all was! She might have fallen into a new world. It was curious to listen to this new opening of human life; but she was young, and not enough of a spectator to be able to disengage

herself, and be amused with a free mind by the humours of a scene with which she had nothing to do. She looked still a little wistfully at the little crowd, where there was nobody who knew anything of herself, or thought her worth the trouble of making acquaintance with. Joyce had not heard any fine conversation as yet, nor had she encountered any of the wit or wisdom which she had expected; but still she could not free herself from the idea that to be among the ladies and the gentlemen would be more entertaining than here, with Miss Marsham giving her a sketch of the history of the Sitwells and the church controversies of the place, and the school children quite beyond her reach playing Hunt the Slipper in the background. She was much too young to take any comfort in the thought that such is life, and that the gay whirl of society very often resolves itself into standing in a corner and hearing somebody else's private history, not always so innocent or from so benevolent a historian.

But presently, and all in a moment, the aspect of affairs changed for Joyce. It changed in a completely unreasonable, and, indeed, altogether inadequate way,—not by an introduction among the best people, the crowd whose appearance filled the clergyman and his wife, and all their retainers, with transports a trifle short of celestial; not in making acquaintance with Sir Sam Thompson, the soap-boiler, whose appearance was the climax of the triumph—a climax so complete that it turned the scale, and made the Sitwells' hard-hearted partisan sorry for the Canon. None of these great things befell Joyce. All that happened was the appearance of a tall individual, separating himself from the crowd, and walking towards her from the lower level.

'Here is a gentleman coming this way,' said Miss Marsham. 'I don't think he is one of the school committee, or any one I know. But I am rather short-sighted, and I may be mistaking him for some one else, as I do so often. Dear Miss Hayward, I am sure you must have good eyes: will you look and tell me. Ah, I see you know him.'

'It is Captain Bellendean,' said Joyce. Her musing face had grown bright.

'Who is Captain Bellendean? Does he take an interest in Sunday schools? Is he——' Here Miss Marsham turned to look at her companion, and though she was short-sighted, she was not without certain insights which women seldom altogether lose. 'Oh!' she said, and, with a subdued smile and a sparkle out of her brown eyes, which for a moment made her middle-aged face both young and bright, returned to the children who were playing

Hunt the Slipper, and though she had said she was too stiff for that game, was down among them in a moment as lively as any there.

It is to be doubted whether Joyce was conscious that her friend of ten minutes' standing had left her, or how she left her. She stood looking down upon the same scene, her face still full of musing, but touched with light which changed and softened every line. 'I have been looking for you everywhere,' said Captain Bellendean; 'when I got free of that rabble you were nowhere to be seen. I might have thought you would turn to the children, who have some nature about them. And so I had the sense to do at last.'

'Do you call them rabble?' said Joyce.

'Not if it displeases you,' he said. 'But what are they after all? Society is always more or less a rabble, and here you get it naked, without the brilliancy and the glow which takes one in in town.'

Perhaps Captain Bellendean had not found himself so much appreciated as he thought himself entitled to be in town, and thus produced these sentiments, which are so common, with a little air of conviction, as if they had never been heard before. And indeed, save in books, where she had often met them, Joyce had never heard them before.

'And yet,' said Joyce, 'when educated people meet—people that have read and have seen the world—it must be more interesting to hear them talk than—than any other pleasure.'

'May we sit down here? the grass is quite dry. Educated people? I am sure I don't know, for I seldom meet them, and I'm very uninstructed myself. But I'll tell you what, Miss Joyce, you are the only educated person I know. Talk to me, and I will listen, and I have no doubt it will be far more entertaining to me than any other diversion; but whether it may have the same effect on you——' he said, looking up to her from the grass upon which he had thrown himself, with inquiring eyes.

Oh, Andrew Halliday! whose boast was education, who would have tackled her upon the most abstruse subjects, or talked Shakespeare and the musical glasses as long as she pleased,—how was it that the soldier's brag of his ignorance seemed to Joyce far more delightful than any such music of the spheres?

CHAPTER XXIV

NORMAN BELLENDEAN appeared very often at Richmond. He made what Mrs. Hayward considered quite an exhibition of himself at that school feast—in a way which no man had any right to do, unless—— People asked who he was—a distinguished-looking man, and quite new to society in Richmond. It is well known that in the country a man who is really a man—neither a boy of twenty nor an aged beau masquerading as such—is always received with open arms. Half a dozen ladies, with water-parties, or dances, or some other merrymaking in hand, asked Mrs. Sitwell anxiously who her friend was. ‘And could you induce him to come to my dance on the 23d?’ or to my picnic, or whatever it might be. He formed in some degree the climax of that most successful entertainment; for the little clergywoman was too clever to confess that in reality she knew nothing whatever about Captain Bellendean. She replied evasively that she did not know what his engagements were,—that he had only come from town for that afternoon; and so got herself much worship in the eyes of all around, who knew how very difficult it was, what an achievement almost impossible, to get a man to come from town, while still the season lingered on. It was just as well, the disappointed ladies said; for a man who could *afficher* himself, as he had been doing with that Miss Hayward, was either an engaged man, and so comparatively useless, or a dangerous man, who had better be kept at arm’s-length by prudent mothers with daughters. An engaged man, as is well known, is a man with the bloom taken off him. He cannot be expected to make himself agreeable as another man would do—for either he will not, being occupied with his own young lady, or else he ought not, having a due regard to the susceptibilities of other young ladies who might not be informed of his condition. And to see him sitting on the grass at Joyce’s feet was a thing which made a great impression upon two

people—upon Lady St. Clair, who knew Norman's value, and whose heart had beat quicker for a moment, wondering if it was for Dolly, or Ally, or Minnie, or Fanny, that the Lord of Bellen-dean had come ; whereas it appeared it was for none of them, but for the Haywards, and that stiff girl of theirs. The other person was Mrs. Hayward herself, who, after all the trouble she had been at in making up her mind to Joyce, thus found herself, as it seemed, face to face with the possibility of being released from Joyce, which was very startling, and filled her with many thoughts. It would, no doubt, be a fine termination to her trouble, and would restore the household to its original comfortable footing. But besides that she grudged such wonderful good luck to a girl, who really had done nothing to deserve it, Mrs. Hayward felt that, even with Joyce married, things could not return to their old happy level. No revolution can be undone altogether ; it must leave traces, if not on the soil over which it has passed, at least on the constitution of affairs. The house could never be, even without Joyce, as easy, as complete, as tranquil, as before it was aware that Joyce existed. Therefore her mind was driven back into a chaos of uncertainties and disagreeables.

Besides, it was not in the abstract a proper thing for a man to *afficher* himself in such a way. It was wrong, in the first place, unless he was very certain he meant it, compromising the girl ; and even if he meant it, it was an offence against decorum, and put the girl's mother, or the person unfortunately called upon to act in the place of the girl's mother, in a most uncomfortable position ; for what could she say ? Should she be asked, as it would be most natural that people should ask, whether it was a settled thing, what answer could she make ? For she felt sure that it was not a settled thing,—nothing indeed but a caprice of this precious Captain's. To amuse himself, nothing but that ! And yet she felt with an angry helplessness, especially galling to Elizabeth, who had hitherto commanded her husband with such absolute ease and completeness, that this was a case in which she could not get the Colonel to act. He would not bring the man to book : he would not ask him what he meant by it. Of this Mrs. Hayward was as certain as that night is not day. Colonel Hayward could not be taught even to be distant to the Captain. He could not behave coldly to him ; and as for herself, how could she act when the father took no notice ? This was one of the things which, even under the most skilful management, could not be done.

It kept Mrs. Hayward all the more anxious that young Bellen-

dean continued to appear from time to time without invitation, sometimes indeed bringing invitations of his own. Twice there was a water-party, the first time conducted by Mrs. Bellendean, and to which a party came from town, including Greta—a large and merry party, which the St. Clairs were asked to join as well as the Haywards. The gratification of this, which brought her into bonds of apparent intimacy with Lady St. Clair, her most important neighbour, threw a pleasant mist over Mrs. Hayward's sharpness of observation; but she was suddenly brought back to her anxieties by remarking the eagerness of Mrs. Bellendean to have Joyce with her on the return voyage. Joyce had been in Norman's boat on the way up the stream, while Greta sat sedately by her elder relative; but in coming back Mrs. Bellendean had shown so determined a desire for Joyce, that the Captain's plans were put out. Mrs. Hayward, till that time rapt in the golden air of the best society, feeling herself definitely adopted into the charmed circle of 'the best people,' had forgotten everything else for the moment, when she suddenly became aware of a little discussion going on. 'Joyce, you must really come with me. I have scarcely had the chance of a word. Greta will take your place in the other boat, and you must—you really must give me your company.' 'What is the good of disturbing the arrangement?' said Norman's deeper voice, in a slight growl. 'Oh, I must have Joyce,' said the other. And Mrs. Hayward, looking up, saw a little scene which was very dramatic and suggestive. The Captain, in his flannels, which are generally a very becoming costume, making his dark, bronzed, and bearded face all the more effective and imposing, stooping to hold the boat which Joyce had been about to enter, looking up, half angry, half pleading, as his glance was divided between the two ladies. Joyce's foot had been put forward to step on board, when her elder friend caught her arm; and Mrs. Hayward's keen eyes observed the change of expression, the sudden check with which Joyce drew back. And the change was effected, notwithstanding the Captain's opposition. Mrs. Hayward did the girl the justice to say that she did not look either dull or angry when she was transferred to the other boat; but she was subdued—sedate as Greta had been, and as was suited to the atmosphere of the elder people. The Colonel, it need not be said, was among the younger ones, making himself very happy, but not pleased, any more than his inferior officer, to have Joyce taken away.

This little episode was one concerning which not a word was said. The immediate actors made no remark whatever, either

good or bad. Mrs. Bellendean held Joyce's hand in hers, and talked to her all the way with the tenderest kindness; and save that she had fallen back into more of her ordinary air, and was serious as usual, Joyce showed no consciousness that she had been removed from one boat to another, *pour cause*. Was she aware of it? her step-mother asked herself; did she know? Mrs. Hayward replied to herself that a woman is always a woman, however inexperienced, and that she must know: but did not specify in her thoughts what the knowledge was.

And in the evening, when all was over, when the visitors had departed after the cold collation which Mrs. Hayward thought it necessary to have prepared for them on their return, though that had not been in the programme of the day's pleasure—she held a conversation with the Colonel on the subject, which gave much information to that unobservant man. 'Did you tell me, Henry,' she said, opening all at once a sort of masked battery upon the unsuspecting soldier, pleasantly fatigued with his party of pleasure, 'or have I only imagined, that there was some man—in Scotland—some sort of a lover, or engagement, or something—that had to do with Joyce?'

'My dear!' the Colonel cried, taken by surprise.

'Yes, but tell me. Did I dream it, or did you say something?'

'There was a man,' the Colonel admitted, with great reluctance, 'at the cottage that day, who said—— But Joyce has never spoken to me on the subject—never a word.'

'But there was a man?' Mrs. Hayward said.

'There was a man: but entirely out of the question, quite out of the question, Elizabeth. You would have said so yourself if you had seen him.'

'Never mind that. Most likely quite suitable for her in her former circumstances. But that is not the question at all. What I wanted to know was just what you tell me. There was a man——'

'I have never heard a word of him from that day to this. Joyce has never referred to him. I hope never to hear his name again.'

'Ah!' said Mrs. Hayward, opposing the profound calm of a spectator to the rising excitement of her listener. 'I wonder, now, what he would think of Captain Bellendean.'

'Of Bellendean? why, what should he think? What is there about Bellendean to be thought of? Yes, yes, himself of course, and he's a very fine fellow; but that is not what you mean.'

'Do you mean to say, Henry, that you did not remark how

the Captain, as she calls him, *affiche*s himself everywhere—far more than I consider becoming—with Joyce ?’

‘*Affiches* himself! My dear, I don’t know exactly what you mean by that. So many French words are used nowadays.’

‘Makes a show of himself, then—marks her out for other people’s remark—can’t see her anywhere but he is at her side, or her feet, or however it may happen. Why, didn’t you remark he insisted on having her in his boat to-day, and paid no attention to the young lady from town who was of his own party and came with him, and of course ought to have had his first care?’

‘My dear, I was in that boat. It was natural Joyce should be with me.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Mrs. Hayward; ‘and accordingly Captain Bellendean, with that self-denial which distinguishes young men, put out his own people in order that you might have her near you. How considerate!’

‘Elizabeth! not more considerate, I am sure, than you would be for any one who might feel herself a little out of it,—a little strange, perhaps, not knowing many people,—not with much habit of society.’

‘My dear Henry, you are an old goose,’ was what his wife said.

But when there was another water-party proposed, she looked very closely after her step-daughter—not, however, in the way of interfering with Captain Bellendean’s attentions,—for why should she interfere on behalf of Greta or any one else? let their people look after them,—but only by way of keeping a wise control and preventing anything like this *affichageement*, which might make people talk. Captain Bellendean was a free man, so far as any one knew; he had a right to dispose of himself as he pleased. There was no reason why she should interfere against the interests of Joyce. To be sure, it gave her a keen pang of annoyance to think of this girl thus securing every gift of fortune. What had she done that all the prizes should be rained down at her feet? But at the same time, Mrs. Hayward began to feel a dramatic interest in the action going on before her eyes—an action such as is a great secret diversion and source of amusement to women everywhere—the unfolding of the universal love-tale; and her speculations as to whether it would ever come to anything, and what it would come to, and when the *dénouement* would be reached, gave, in spite of herself, a new interest to her life. She watched Joyce with less of the involuntary hostility which she had in vain struggled against, and more abstract interest than had yet been possible—looking at

her, not as Joyce, but as the heroine of an ever-exciting story. The whole house felt the advantage of this new point of view. It ameliorated matters, both upstairs and down, and, strangely enough, made things more easy for Baker and the cook, as well as for Joyce, while the little romance went on.

All this took place very quickly, the water-parties following each other in rapid succession, so that Joyce was, so to speak, plunged into what, to her unaccustomed mind, was truly a whirl of gaiety, before the day on which Canon Jenkinson called with his wife in state—a visit which was almost official, and connected with the great fact of Joyce's existence and appearance, of which they had as yet taken no formal notice. Mrs. Jenkinson was, in her way, as remarkable in appearance as her husband. She was almost as tall, and though there were no rotundities about her, her fine length of limb showed in a free and large movement which went admirably with the Canon's swing. They came into the room as if they had been a marching regiment; and being great friends, and having known the Haywards for a number of years, began immediately to criticise all their proceedings with a freedom only to be justified by these well-known facts.

'So this is the young lady,' Mrs. Jenkinson said. She rose up to have Joyce presented to her, and, though Joyce was over the common height, subdued her at once to the size and sensations of a small schoolgirl under the eyes of one of those awful critics of the nursery who cow the boldest spirit. 'I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, my dear.' The Canon's wife was a very well educated woman, but her English was not perfect. She used various of those colloquialisms which are growing more and more common in ordinary talk. The reader will not imagine that, in reporting such dreadful forms of speech, the writer has any sympathy with persons who are capable of saying that they are very pleased.

'I am very pleased to make your acquaintance,' said Mrs. Jenkinson; 'how do you do? I think I ought both to have had information of this wonderful appearance upon the scene and to have had you brought to see me; but that is, of course, not your fault: and though late, I am very delighted to make friends with you. She has a nice face,' she added, turning to Mrs. Hayward. 'I like her face. No doubt she will give you a great deal of trouble, but in your place I should expect to make something of a girl with that kind of looks.'

'I am sure Joyce is very much obliged to you for thinking so well of her. It remains to be seen what we are to make of each

other—but I never pretended to be so clever,' Mrs. Hayward said.

'As for pretending, that is neither here nor there. I want you to tell me all about it now,—not for my sake, but that I may have something to answer when people bother me with questions. That is the worst of not being quite frank. When you make a mystery about anything, people always imagine there is a great deal more in it. I always say it is the best policy to make a clean breast of everything at once.'

'There is no clean breast to make. I have all along said precisely the same thing—which is, that she couldn't possibly have been with us in India, and that she was brought up by her mother's friends.'

'The first wife,' said Mrs. Jenkinson; 'poor thing, I have always heard she died very young, but never before that she left a child.'

'Few people are so clever as to hear everything. You perceive that it was the case, nevertheless,' Mrs. Hayward said, with a sparkle in her eyes.

'And I hear you are plunging her into all sorts of gaiety, and that there is a follower, as the maids say, already, or something very like one—a Scotch officer, or something of that sort. You are not so pleased to have her, but what you would be resigned to get rid of her, I suppose.'

'I can't tell what you suppose, or what you may have heard,' said the Colonel's wife. 'I hope I will do my duty to my husband's daughter whatever the circumstances may be.'

'Oh, I don't mean to throw any doubt upon that; but we were very surprised,' Mrs. Jenkinson said.

In the meantime the Canon had withdrawn to the other side of the room and called Joyce to him, who had been considerably alarmed by the beginning of this interchange of hostilities. 'Come here and talk to me,' he said. 'You have not kept faith with me. I have got a crow to pluck with you, my new parishioner. You went to that affair of the Sitwells after all.'

'My father took me,' said Joyce, with natural evasion; and then she added, 'but there was no reason I should not go.'

'Here's a little rebel,' said the Canon; 'not only flies in my face, but tells me there's no reason why she shouldn't. Come, now, answer me my question. Are you a good Churchwoman—they turn out very good Church principles in Scotland when they are of the right sort—or are you a horrid little Presbyterian? you wouldn't answer me the other day.'

'I am a—horrid Presbyterian,' Joyce said, with an unusual amusement and sense of humour breaking through her shyness and strangeness. The Canon was the first person who had touched any natural chord in her.

'I thought as much,' he said. 'Hayward, here's a pretty business. As if it were not enough to have a nest of rebels conspiring under my very nose, here's a little revolutionary with no respect for any constituted authority whom you've brought among us. But I must teach you the error of your ways. You shall come and hear me preach my famous sermon on Calvin, and if after that you find you have a leg to stand upon—but I suppose you're ready to go to the stake for your religion, however wrong it may be proved to be?'

'I was never taught,' said Joyce, with her schoolmistress air, 'that it was a religion at all—for them that instructed me said we were all at one in our religion, and that it was only the forms of Church government——'

'Do you hear that, Hayward! This will never do. I see she means to convert me. And that's why she sympathises with these Sitwells and their demonstrations. You were there too. And they dragged that old boy—that big Sir Sam—to their place, by way of a little extra triumph over me—as if I cared for the soap-boiler. And, Hayward, you were there too.'

'Elizabeth,' said the Colonel abashed, 'as they made so great a point of it, thought we might as well go.'

'And fly in the face of your oldest friend,' said the Canon. 'Look here, I am going to be great friends with this girl of yours. I'll bring her over to my side, and she'll help me to make mince-meat of these St. Augustine people. What is her name?—Joyce—why, to be sure, that was her mother's——' The Canon's fine bass dropped into a lower key, and he broke off with a 'poor thing, poor thing! Well, my dear, I don't mean to stand on any ceremony with you. I mean to call you Joyce, seeing I have known your father since before you were born. You shouldn't have taken him off to that business in Wombwell's field, and made him take sides against me.'

'I did not know—one side from another,' said Joyce; 'and besides, it was not me.'

It was very hard for her not to say 'sir' to him. He belonged to the class of men who are in the way of visiting schools, and to whom a little schoolmistress looks up as the greatest of earthly potentates; but she resisted the inclination heroically.

'Well,' he said, 'I don't doubt both of these things are true, but you shall hear all about it. Why, I set up the man!

It was I who put him in that district—it was I who got it constituted a district—you know, Hayward. They were starving in a curacy when I put them there. Not that I blame Sitwell—it's that little sprite of a wife of his that is at the bottom of it all. A little woman like that can't keep out of mischief. She runs to it like a duck to the water. And they thought they would make an end of me by laying hold of that old soap-boiler—old Sam! Soapy Sam, no doubt she'll call him—that woman has a nickname for everybody. She calls me the Great Gun, do you know? If she doesn't take care she'll find that guns, and Canons too, have got shot in them. Why, she's got that good old Cissy Marsham away from me—that old fool that is worth ten thousand soap-boilers.'

'Oh no,' said Joyce.

'What?' cried the Canon—'not worth ten thousand soap-boilers? No, you are right; I meant ten million—I was under the mark.'

And then Joyce told her little story about Miss Marsham's regrets. And the Canon's melodious throat gave forth a soft roar of laughter, which brought a little moisture to his eyes. 'I always knew I should have you on my side,' he said. 'Here's this little schismatic extracting the only little drop of honey there was in all that prickly wilderness—and laughing in her sleeve all the time to see the Church folks quarrelling. But don't you be too cock-sure: for I'll have you converted and as stanch a Church-woman as any in the diocese before Michaelmas—if that Scotch fellow leaves us the time,' the Canon said, with another big but soft laugh.

That Scotch fellow! Joyce grew very red, and then very pale. There was only one, as far as she was aware, who could be called by that name. And how completely she had forgotten him and his existence, and those claims of his! The shock made her head swim, and the very earth under her feet insecure.

CHAPTER XXV

THERE had been great exultation in St. Augustine's over the demonstration. At the lively supper-party which was held in the little house which the Sitwells occupied, *en attendant* the parsonage which had been promised them (it was one of their chief grievances that no steps had been as yet taken towards carrying out this promise), on the evening after the school-feast, the parson's wife had been more animated, more witty even, than usual. She had made quite a little drama of the possible scene going on in the rectory, where the Canon and his wife were supposed to be discussing the matter. She walked about the room to represent Mrs. Jenkinson panting with rage, demanding, 'Canon, what where you doing that you let it be? Why didn't you stop it? Why didn't you interfere? I'd rather have written to the bishop, and had them turned off on the spot—that man : and that woman ! The woman is far the worst, in my opinion. I am very surprised that you didn't interfere !' Then Mrs. Sitwell puffed herself out so that you would actually have believed her to be Canon Jenkinson, and made her small voice into something as like his softly rolling bass as was possible to so different an organ. 'If you will consider, my dear, there was nothing to go to the bishop with. The most contemptible of creatures, even a curate, is committing no crime when he gets up a school-feast ; and he may even be so abandoned as to give a garden-party, and still his bishop would not interfere. Bishops have too little power—their hands are dreadfully tied. If ever I take a bishopric, I hope they'll be good for something more——' 'I should hope so, indeed !' cried the imaginary Canon's wife in asthmatic pants. 'The Thompsons too—poor Sir Sam, who is too good-natured for anything. You will see that odious little woman will turn him round her finger. He'll build their parsonage—he'll back them up in everything. He'll get them a grant for their schools, Canon ;

and it will be your fault if you let him slip through your fingers. Austin, dear !' cried little Mrs. Sitwell, suddenly becoming herself, with her little ingratiating look, and her voice a little thin, high-pitched, and shrill—'Austin, dear ! will you turn upon me if I let him slip out of mine ?'

Austin dear had laughed until he had cried over these sketches of his ecclesiastical superiors, and so had the Rev. Mr. Bright, and even good Miss Marsham—for they were well done ; and the cleverness with which this small person made herself into the semblance of two large people was wonderful. But afterwards Mr. Sitwell shook his head a little. 'I hope he will do what you, or rather Mrs. Jenkinson, thinks,' he said. 'I sha'n't mind how much you turn him round your little finger : but these fat men are not so easily influenced as you would suppose,' he added, with a sigh.

'And, my dear,' said Miss Marsham, nervously pulling out the little bit of yellow lace round her wrist, and keeping her eyes upon it, 'though you make me laugh—I can't help it, it is so funny to hear you do them—yet, you know, if they feel it as much as that, I am sorry. I want you to get your parsonage, and I want St. Augustine's to get on. I am sure if I had money enough I should like, above all things, to give it you for all your schemes ; but I don't want *them* to suffer—I don't, indeed,' she said, making a little hole in her lace, and then trying with nervous efforts to draw it together. Miss Marsham was of opinion, ever after, that this hole in her old Mechlin was in some way judicial,—a judgment upon her for having participated, however unwillingly, in the ridicule of her old friends.

'As for Sir Sam, if he resists Mrs. Sitwell, he will be the first who has done it,' said Mr. Bright admiringly. He was not aware that she called him 'Angels ever Bright and Fair' when he was not present, and sang that sacred ditty with all his little airs and graces, so that the circle permitted to see the performance nearly died with laughter—or so at least they said.

But the demonstration was over, and nothing more happened. The sudden stop which comes to all excitement when it has been stirred up to a boiling pitch, and afterwards has just to subside again and nothing happens—is painful. The Sitwells went on from day to day expecting a letter from Sir Sam, in which he should propose to build the parsonage (he could so easily !—it would not have cost him a truffle from his dinner, of which the doctor said he ate far too much), or to start the subscription for it with a good round sum, so as to induce others to follow—or, at the very

least, enclosing a cheque for the schools. But nothing came, not even an invitation to dinner, which would have afforded an occasion to the parson's wife to turn the fat gentleman round her finger, as she had almost engaged to do. Nothing came except, in a fortnight's time, an invitation to—a garden-party! Mrs. Sitwell cried with anger and disappointment when this arrived. She took it in to her husband in his study, after she had calmed down a little. 'Look what I have got!' she said; 'an invitation to Alkaleigh—to a garden-party—next month. What shall I say?'

'A garden-party! is that all it has come to?' cried the parson; and then he added, angrily, 'Say we've no time for such nonsense—say we never go to garden-parties—say we're engaged.'

'I don't think we should do that. I was very angry too, for the first moment; but when I came to think of it, I felt sure it was *her* doing. Women never want their husbands to give away their money. And at a garden-party, you know, Austin, there are such opportunities—when you have your wits about you, and can make use of them.'

'It doesn't seem as if we did much when we had him in Wombwell's field—at your command,' the parson said.

This change of pronouns was very significant, and the sharp little clergywoman perceived it instantly. Austin did not like the idea of wheedling a soap-boiler—especially when it was entirely unsuccessful. He did not want it to be supposed, even by himself, that he ever countenanced such unworthy ways. A man cannot (notwithstanding all Biblical and other warrants for it) control his wife, or get her to refrain from using her own methods; and so long as it is clearly understood that he is not responsible for them—— Adam did not object to the apple,—rather liked it, so far as we have any information; but he wished it to be known that it was his wife's doing, not any suggestion of his. Unfortunately, however, he could not slide out of the responsibility, as Mr. Sitwell, among a community always disposed to think it was *her* doing, was not unhopeful of being able to do.

'I gave in to you about making a demonstration,' he said. 'It cost a good deal of money, Dora, and I can't say I ever heartily approved of it; but I gave in, thinking you knew more of society than I did, and that you might be right. And it was a great success, you all said. No; I don't say anything against that. I daresay it was a success; but what has come of it? Nothing at all—except twenty pounds for the schools, counting that ten of Cissy Marsham's, which we should have had anyhow.'

'Twenty pounds is always something, Austin,' said Mrs. Sitwell, ignoring the drawback. 'And it is a great deal to have made it so fully known. Sow your bread, don't you know, by all waters, and it will return to us after many days.'

'That's all very well, my dear,' said the parson, a little subdued—for how is a man of his cloth to answer when you stop his mouth with a text? He added, however, somewhat dolefully, 'And not a move about the parsonage; and if we are to stay here another winter, when not a single door or window fits, and the rain is always coming in through the roof——'

'We must stay here another winter, and there is an end of it!' cried his wife. 'If the subscriptions were full and money to spare, they couldn't build the parsonage in four months. You must see the landlord, Austin, and get him to do something. And we must think of something else to get up the money; we haven't tried half the things we might. Why, if the worst comes to the worst we can have a bazaar. There's always money to be made in that way: and private theatricals, and a concert—and——'

'Dora, you know I hate bazaars.'

'Everybody says so,' said Mrs. Sitwell. 'But everybody goes, and everybody buys, no matter what rubbish it is. People that won't give a shilling will spend twenty in materials for making up some trumpery or other, and twenty more in buying other trumpery that other people have made. Bazaars must respond to some need of human nature, Austin, which it has been left to this generation to find out.'

'It looks like it,' says the parson. 'But don't talk to me about it, Dora. If it has to be, I suppose I shall find philosophy enough to tolerate it when the time comes.'

'Oh, tolerate it! You will be out and in ten times a day, making pretty speeches to all the ladies,' cried little Mrs. Sitwell, with a laugh. 'Depend upon it, you will find a bazaar responds to some need of your nature too.' She said this, though he did not find it out, so exactly in her husband's own tone, and with his manner, that she had to laugh herself at the double joke of her own fun and his unconsciousness. 'And "Angels ever Bright and Fair" will enjoy it above all things. He will wonder how we never thought of a thing so delightfully calculated to bring people together before.'

This time it was the parson who laughed, recognising the voice of Mr. Bright and all his ways, and even his appearance evolved as if by witchcraft.

'You are really incorrigible, Dora,' he said, turning back to his

sermon with a mind amused. But he did not know altogether how incorrigible she was, and that he himself, all innocent and unsuspecting, had been a victim too.

‘And I’ll go and see whether I can’t get Joyce to make her father do something,’ cried the parson’s wife.

Joyce had been plunged in spite of herself into this new and strange current of life. The Miss St. Clairs, notwithstanding the momentary intimacy of the boating party, made few advances towards friendship; but Mrs. Sitwell was very eager to secure her society, and also her help in the many activities which absorbed the clergywoman’s busy life. And there could be no doubt that it was very convenient to Mrs. Hayward that her step-daughter should have a friend who would relieve herself from the duty of tolerating Joyce’s constant companionship, and providing for her entertainment. Joyce, with a singular impartiality and fairness of mind, herself perceived the advantages of this, and what it must be to her father’s wife to be now and then free of her presence, and able to act as if no grown-up daughter, no unexpected much-claiming personage had ever been in existence. She had a certain sympathy even with Mrs. Hayward—and she allowed herself to be drawn into the other current, with wistful yet genuine understanding of its expediency. Indeed, Joyce went on day by day making discoveries, learning fully only now when she seemed to have settled into her place in her father’s house, all the difficulties, the almost impossibilities of it. She felt her disjunction from her past growing day by day, and that was perhaps the worst of all.

The very climax of disquietude and distress came upon her suddenly one day when she was sitting in her room writing her usual letter to Janet, the long journal-letter which had been her safety-valve in her early troubles. In the midst of her writing, while she was giving that minute account of herself and of all her actions, which was everything to her old grandmother, Joyce suddenly awoke as from a dream, with a burning blush, and threw away her pen out of her hand, as if it had been *that* that was in the wrong. That little implement, which, one way or other, does so much for us, betraying us, expounding us even to ourselves, seemed to her for the moment like a tricky demon drawing out of her things which it was against her honour to say. She got up suddenly, pushing away the table and the letter—things that were in the conspiracy! and with a great deal of agitation walked about the room to subdue the beating in her heart. How was it she had never felt, never recognised till now, the difference? Not

Janet's child, free to secure in everything the sympathy of those old people who belonged to her, but Joyce Hayward, her father's daughter, bound by a hundred ties, bound above all to betray his household to no one, not to those who were dearest to her. Joyce was very miserable for a time over this discovery. It stopped not only her letter but the whole course of her thoughts. When she resumed her writing, it was with a poignant sense of unreality, a feeling that her letter was fictitious, written not to reveal but to conceal, which took all the comfort and pleasure out of it. She felt that Janet would read between the lines that it was no longer her Joyce that was writing, but Colonel Hayward's daughter. Their relationship seemed to change in a moment, to become a thing unreal, no longer full of solace and confidence, but fictitious, strained, and untrue.

For a time she no longer cared to write at all, making excuses, finding that she had not time—that to put off till to-morrow was a relief. The change made her heart sick. She felt as if she had been over again cut adrift from what she loved best. And yet it had to be. Hers was not the hand to lift any veil from the doorways of her father's house, or hand over its household manners to remark, or take refuge from it in another. She wrote a longer letter than usual to Janet after that abrupt awakening, and kissed and cried over it when she sent it away, redoubling the tender words in which she was usually shy of indulging, and writing protestations of affection which had been unnecessary, and which she felt to ring untrue. But how could she better it? It was her first false letter, yet so loyal—the first little rift within the lute, and the music was mute already. She accompanied it with many an anxious, wondering thought, but never knew what Janet thought of it, if Janet had perceived. If Janet did perceive, she never let her nursling suspect it. And not a word was said between them; but it is scarcely to be believed that the acute and keen intellect of the old woman, and her tremulous sympathy with every movement in the mind of her child, could pass over that change which to Joyce's consciousness was so complete.

To say that the letters to Andrew Halliday grew few and rare would be to say little. Joyce began to feel the writing of them as the greatest burden of her life. She did not know what to say to him—how to address him. His very name made her tremble. Her heart, which had never beaten two beats quicker for his presence, sank now into depths unknown at the thought of him. What if he were to come to claim her! That he would do so one day, Joyce felt a terrifying, awful conviction. And would she be

bound to arise and go with him—to leave everything that she was beginning to love? Joyce knew nothing else that could be done. She had pledged him her word. To withdraw from it because—because, as she had said, she was Colonel Hayward's daughter—how should she do that? He was the inevitable, standing at the end of all things—a sort of visible fate.

Joyce shuddered and turned away from this thought. To escape from it, to hide her face and not see that image in her pathway, became more and more a necessity as the days went on. And this was another reason for finding refuge in the society which was close to her, though it was so perplexing and unfamiliar. Anyhow, it was more comprehensible than garden-parties and lawn-tennis, which, to the spirit of the Scotch peasant which was in her, were inscrutable pleasures regarded with awe. Joyce did not understand these rites. She understood Mrs. Sitwell's schemes a little better, though still with wonderment and many failures in comprehension. And it took her a long time to find out that the parson's wife intended to employ her for the furtherance of her own purposes, and that it was the novelty of her and her unlikeness to other people which made her attractive to her new friend. Mrs. Sitwell wooed Joyce with flattering pertinacity. She showered invitations upon her. She took the girl into her confidence, telling her how much she wanted, how little she had, and unbosoming herself about her pecuniary concerns in a way which horrified her listener. For Joyce had the strong Scotch prejudice against any confession of poverty or appeal for help. She had been trained in the stern doctrine that to starve or die was possible, but not to beg or expose your sorrows to the vulgar eye. When the parson's wife told of her poverty, which she was quite willing to do, to the first comer, Joyce listened with a painful blush, with a sense of shame. She was very sorry—but horrified to see behind the scenes, to be admitted thus, as she felt, to the sanctuary which ought to be kept sacred. But for the woman who had bestowed upon her this painful confidence, Joyce felt that she must be ready to do everything. It could not be for nothing that such a confidence was bestowed.

Mrs. Sitwell, for her part, did not care at all for what poor Joyce considered this exposure of her circumstances. She told her tale with a light heart. She was not ashamed of being poor. 'It's very nice of you to be so sorry,' she said. 'And, my dear, if you would just say a word to the Colonel, and get him to set things agoing. He could do it quite, *quite* easily. If you were to take an opportunity when you are walking with him, or when

you have him alone. But I don't doubt you would have done that, you kind thing, without being asked——'

'Oh no,' said Joyce; 'I would not have betrayed your confidence, nor said a word——'

'Oh, my confidence! It is only rich people that can hope to keep their affairs to themselves. I didn't want you to make any secret of it. Just say to your father, who is so kind—whatever you please, my dear. I can trust you. Say, "Dear daddy, those Sitwells are so poor! don't you think you could do something for them?" or any other thing that will please him and make him think well of us.'

'Oh,' said Joyce, with a low exclamation of fright and horror. The suggestion that she should say 'dear daddy' put a final crown upon the extraordinary mission confided to her. But Mrs. Sitwell thought it the most natural thing in the world.

'Don't do it when Mrs. Hayward is by, that's all. Oh, she's an excellent woman, I know; but it's always the women, you know, that hold back. But for the women, we should have had the parsonage long ago; they won't let people be liberal. I often say, if there were no ladies in the parish—oh, what a difference! I shouldn't be a bit afraid even of the Great Gun himself.'

'You seem to think that it is women who do everything—especially everything that is bad,' said Joyce, with a gleam of amusement.

'And so it is,' said Mrs. Sitwell, with a sigh. 'If one could only get hold of the gentlemen by themselves. I should like to be the one woman to make them do all I wanted,' she continued, with a laugh. She was the product of a very advanced civilisation, much beyond anything which her untrained companion knew.

CHAPTER XXVI

JOYCE, being so untrained, had, however, but a poor account to give of her intercession. The Colonel could do nothing without Elizabeth, and his promise to consult his wife and see what steps could be taken did not convey much comfort to the parson's wife. She listened to Joyce's account of the manner in which she had fulfilled her commission with a lengthening face. At the end she jumped up and gave the girl a kiss which took Joyce very much by surprise. To this inexperienced Scotch peasant-girl the ways of the English were extravagant and full of demonstration, as are to English persons the manners of 'foreigners' in general, both being disposed to believe that to show so much was rather an indication that there was little feeling to show.

'I am sure you meant it as well as possible,' she said, 'but you should have seized an opportunity and spoken to the dear Colonel when there was nobody there. Oh, I am sure you are as good as gold—and perhaps if they will really get up a movement — But I've been promised that so often, I have not much faith in it. I thought you might just whisper a word to your dear father, who thinks all the world of you, and the thing would have been done.' 'It is the women,' continued this oracle, 'as I told you before, who hold back. If we had only the men to deal with, it would be much easier to manage. But the women calculate and reckon up, and they say, "It will be a loss of so much on the year's income;" or "There is so and so I wanted to buy; if I let him give the money away, I shall have to do without it." That is how they go on. Whereas the men don't think; they just put their hands in their pockets, and the thing's done—or it isn't done,' she added, with a sudden smile, looking up in Joyce's face. 'Never mind,' she continued, 'don't let us make ourselves unhappy about it. Come and see what I am doing.' She returned to the corner from which she had sprung up on Joyce's

entrance. 'Come and I'll show you my workshop, and how I keep the pot boiling,' she cried.

The room was divided into two, a larger and a smaller portion, with folding-doors, as is usual in such small habitations; but these doors were always open, and Mrs. Sitwell's corner was at the farther end, commanding the whole space. Joyce saw with amazement a quantity of small photographs ranged upon the ornate but rather shabby little desk at which her friend worked, and which was covered with sheets of paper, each containing a piece of writing and a number. Mrs. Sitwell took up one of the photographs and handed it to Joyce.

'Now tell me,' she said, 'what would you think was the character of that gentleman, supposing that you were going to marry him, or to make him your friend, or to engage him as your butler? What would you think of him from his face?'

'I think,' said Joyce, bewildered, 'that I should not be—very fond of him: but I don't know why.'

'Oh, you dreadful little critic! why shouldn't you be fond of him, as you say? He is quite nice-looking—better than half the men you see. Now here is what he really is,' said Mrs. Sitwell, lifting one of the pieces of paper and handing it to Joyce, who read with amazement: 'No. 310.—This face is that of a man full of strength and character. The brow shows great resolution, the eyes much courage and judgment. The mouth is sensitive, and the nose expresses shrewdness and caution. He will be very decided in action, but never rash; very steady in his affections, but slow in forming any ties. There is a great but suppressed love of art and music in the lines about his eyes.'

'Well, dear, do not stare at me so; don't you think, now you look at him again, that it's all true? or perhaps you would like this one better.' The second was the photograph of a simpering girl, in that peculiar combination of stare and simper which only photographs give. 'Now, don't commit yourself,' said Mrs. Sitwell, with a laugh. 'Look at the account of all her perfections before you say anything. "No. 603.—Ethelinda is a young lady of many qualities. Her eyes show great sweetness of disposition. She will be very true, and when she gives her heart, will give it altogether. The lips show a highly sensitive and nervous disposition, feeling too strongly for her own peace. There are also signs of much musical power, and of great constancy in love."'

'Joyce put down these two extraordinary literary compositions with something like consternation. 'It is perhaps stupid of me,' she said, 'not to understand.'

'Oh no; it is not stupid at all. Perhaps you have never seen the *Pictorial*? It has quite a great circulation, and is very popular. This is a new branch of the answers to correspondents that made the *Family Herald* such a success. Don't you know the Answers to Correspondents in the *Family Herald*? Oh, you must indeed have been brought up out of the world! But the *Pictorial* is quite in advance of that. If you send your photograph to the editor, you receive next week a description of your character from Myra. Now Myra is me.'

'Then those—are going into a newspaper,' said Joyce, looking at the pieces of written paper with a mingling of curiosity and shame.

'Those—are going into the *Pictorial*, and they are going to give a great deal of pleasure to various people, and to put a little money into my pocket, which wants it very much,' said the parson's wife. 'Now, what is there to object to in that?'

'Indeed,' said Joyce, 'I was not thinking of objecting. I was only taken by surprise.'

'Ah!' cried Mrs. Sitwell, with a little moisture enhancing the keen sparkling of her eyes, 'that is what you all say, you well-off people, who never knew what it was to want a sovereign! You are surprised at the way we poor unfortunates have to take to make a little money. Why, I would simply do anything for a little money—anything that was not wrong, of course. You don't know what money means to us. It means clothes for the children and a nursemaid to take care of them, and good food, which they require, and a hundred little things, which you people who never were in want of them never think of.'

'But I was not accustomed to be rich. I know what it means to have nothing. No,' Joyce added hurriedly, 'perhaps that is not true; for when I had nothing I wanted nothing, and that must be the same thing as having everything. I find no difference,' she said.

'Then you don't know anything about it, just the same. The dreadful thing is to have nothing and want a great many things—and this is the case of so many of us. How could we live upon poor Austin's little pay? People think a clergyman ought to have private means—but where are we to get the private means? We have a little something in my family, but my mother has it for her life. I don't want my mother to die, who is always so kind to the children, that I may get my little share. It would only be a few hundred pounds, after all. And Austin's people thought they did enough for him when they gave him his education, as they call it—sending him to Oxford to learn expensive habits. A great deal

too much is made of education,' said the parson's wife. 'I don't think I shall take any trouble about education for my children. They get on better without it, in my opinion.'

This dreadful assertion made Joyce gasp with horror. Not take any trouble about education!—which was the only thing in all the world to take trouble about. But she did not trust herself to say anything, and indeed Mrs. Sitwell did not leave her time.

'But they *shall* be comfortable and have things as nice as possible while they are babies,' cried the parson's wife; 'and when I found out that I could do this, I was as pleased as Punch. One goes upon rules, you know—it is not all guess-work; and my opinion is, ~~there~~ is a great deal in it. Austin says that supposing these people had everything in their favour, no bad influences or anything of that kind, then what I find in their faces would be true. Let me see, now. Let me read yours. You have a great deal that is very nice in you, dear. You are of a most generous disposition. You would give anything in the world that you had to give. But you are apt to get frightened, and not to follow it out. And you are musical—I can see it in your eyes.'

'Indeed, I don't know anything at all about music.'

'That has nothing to do with it,' said Mrs. Sitwell. 'You would have been if you had known. And you are *very* sensitive, dear. You put meanings upon what people say, and take offence, or the reverse, when none is meant. You are full of imagination; but you haven't much courage. You love people very much, or you dislike them very much. You are devoted to them, or else you can't endure them.'

'I don't think I ever do that,' said Joyce sedately, taking it all with great gravity.

'Oh, of course you have been modified by education, as Austin says. Nobody is just as nature made them; but that is what you would be if you had been left alone, you know. I'll write it all out for you when I have a little time. Give me back Ethelinda and No. 310. I have a kind of idea these two simpletons are going to be married, and they want each to know a little more of the other—that is, you know, they want the prophet to agree with them; and say this is the sweetest girl that ever was—and that is the nicest man. And you may be sure that the better you speak of any one, the more you will agree with what they think of themselves. When you say they are musical and intellectual, and all that, they think how wonderful that you should understand them so well! though they may be the stupidest of people that ever were seen.'

‘But——’ Joyce said, with timidity.

‘I don’t want any buts. You would never let any one do anything if you were to carry a “but” with you everywhere. If you heard me say to Sir Sam the soap-boiler what excellent taste he had, and how beautiful his house was, you would think it was wrong perhaps, and put in that “but” of yours. But why? Gillow, who did it all, is supposed to have excellent taste, and poor dear Sir Sam thinks it perfection. And it pleases him to be told so. Why shouldn’t I please him? If I were of his way of thinking, I would admire it too; and don’t you see, when you sympathise with a man, and want to please him, you *are* of his way of thinking—for the moment,’ the little lady added. ‘Now just ~~at~~ a minute till I finish off my people,’ she said.

Joyce sat in a bewilderment which had become almost perennial in her mind, and watched the woman of business before her. Mrs. Sitwell took up photograph after photograph, examining each with every appearance of the most conscientious care. She would put down the little portrait, and write a few sentences, looking at it from time to time as a painter might look at his model,—then pausing, biting her lips as if some contradictory feature puzzled her, would take it up again and follow its lines, sometimes with the end of her pen, sometimes with the point of her finger, knitting her brows in the deepest deliberation. ‘I wish people wouldn’t be so much alike,’ she said. ‘I wish they wouldn’t all show the same traits of character. I can’t make all the ladies affectionate and musical, and all the men determined and plucky, can I?—but that’s what they expect, you know. Now here’s one,’ she cried, selecting a photograph, ‘upon whom I shall wreak my rage. She shall be everything she wouldn’t like to be; that will make the others laugh who have got off so much better. I’ll put it as nicely as I can, but she won’t like it. Listen!—“The brows denote much temper, verging upon the sullen, against which I warn Arabella to be on her guard. There is a tendency to envy in the lines of the nose; the thinness of the lips shows an inclination to the use of language which might develop into scolding in later life. The eyes show insensibility to love, which might make her very cruel to her admirers if she has any. Arabella ought to take great care to obtain a proper command of herself, so as to keep these dangerous qualities under. There is a strength in all the lines, which probably will assure her success if she tries; but she will have much to struggle against. There is something in the form of her chin which I suspect to mean love of money, if not avarice; and there seem some traces of greed about the mouth, but of these last I am not

quite sure." There! what do you think of that as a foil? It will make the others more delighted than ever with their own good qualities.'

'And do you see all that in the face?'

'Look!' cried Mrs. Sitwell, placing the photograph before Joyce with a triumphant movement. It was a heavy, unattractive face, such as hang by dozens in the frames of poor photographers, and are accepted by the subjects with that curious human humility which mingles so strangely with human vanity, and teaches us to be complacent about anything which is our own. The parson's wife snatched it back and threw it among the little heap on the table. 'Now I have done for to-day,' she said; 'and you know you are going with me round my district. Don't look so miserable about Arabella; I have sacrificed her to the satisfaction of the others—the greatest happiness of the greatest number, don't you know? But all the same, it's all there—every word's true. I've no more doubt she's a nasty, ill-speaking, ill-tempered toad, than I have that you are the nicest girl I know—only it doesn't always do to say it. If there were many unfavourable ones, inquirers would fall off. I give them one now and then to show what I can do when I think proper. Come along. We'll take a look at the children first, and then we'll go—and forget that there ever was a cheap photograph done. Oh, how I loathe them all!' Mrs. Sitwell said.

They went upstairs accordingly to see the children, of whom there were three, the youngest being a baby of some seven or eight months old. 'They are not fit to be seen,' said the nursemaid, who was maintained by those photographs.

'They have got their nursery overalls on, and not very much underneath,' said their mother. 'We keep our swell things for swell occasions. But look at those legs!' Joyce was not deeply learned in babies' legs, her experience lying among elder children. But there are few women to whom the round, soft, infantine limbs—'the flesh of a little child,' as the Old Testament writer says, when he wants to describe perfect health and freshness—have not a charm, and she was able to admire and praise to the mother's full content. 'Little Augustine—we give him his full name to distinguish him from his father, and also because of the church—is really wonderfully clever, though I say it that shouldn't,' said Mrs. Sitwell; 'and little May is the most perfect little mother! You should see her taking care of baby! Do you know, I was at my Characters two days after that boy was born. I couldn't afford to lose a week! I sat up in bed and did them. Don't you think

it was clever of me?' she said, with a laugh, as they went downstairs—'and never did me the least harm.' The rapid succession of aspects in which this little person disclosed herself took away Joyce's breath. Her mind was of slower action than that of her new friend. She had not been able to settle with herself what she thought of the photographs and the *Pictorial* and the sacrifice of the ugly Arabella, when her companion flashed round upon her in the capacity of the devoted and admiring mother, which softened her sharp voice, and lit up her face with love and sweetness.

Joyce had further surprising experiences to go through in the district, to which she now accompanied the parson's wife, and where everything was new to her. She thought within herself, if the minister's wife had fluttered into her granny's cottage in the same way, and stirred up everything, that the reception Janet would have given her would have been far from agreeable. Yet probably the minister's wife had more means of help than Mrs. Siwell, and the poor women whom she visited more actual money in the shape of wages than Janet had ever possessed. Joyce felt herself retire with a shiver, feeling that quick resentment must follow, when the charitable inquisitor put questions of a more than usually intimate character—but no such result appeared. And there could be no doubt about the practical advantage and thorough sympathy of the visitor. She had a basket in her hand, out of which came sundry little gifts, and her suggestions were boundless. 'I have some old frocks of my boy's that would just do for that little man. Are you sure you can mend them and make them up for him?'

'Well, ma'am, I could try,' the poor woman would say, with a curtsey.

'Oh, I don't believe in trying unless you know how to do it,' said the parson's wife; 'come up to my house at six, and bring the child, and I'll fit them on him, and show you how. You ought to go to the mothers' meeting, where they will show you how to cut out and put things together. It would be so useful to you with all your children.' 'Well, Mrs. Smith,' she ran on, darting in next door, 'I hope things are going on all right with you. Now he's taken the pledge, you ought to be so much more comfortable. But, dear me! you are in as great a muddle as ever.'

'He's took the pledge, but he's not kep' it,' said the woman sullenly.

'I don't wonder, if he has only a house like this to come home to. Why, if I were in a cotton gown and a big apron like you,

I'd have it all spick and span in an hour. I wish I could turn to this moment,' cried the little lady, quivering with energy, 'and show you what sort of a place a man should come home to. Poor Mr. Smith, I don't wonder he's broken the pledge. Why, that poor child makes my heart ache. When did it have its face washed?'

'I haven't the heart to begin,' said Mrs. Smith, subsiding into feeble crying—'I'm that ill and weak. And I don't never get on with anything.'

'Poor thing! is that so? I thought you couldn't be well, you're so helpless. I'll send the mission woman to-morrow morning to put all straight for you, and you'd better go to the doctor to-morrow and let's get at the bottom of it. If you're ill we must get you set right. I'll come and see what the doctor says, and I'll send you something down for the man's supper. But for goodness' sake wash the baby's face and get the place swept up a little before he comes in. That can't hurt you. Come, you mustn't lose heart—we'll see you through it,' said the parson's wife.

There could not be a better parson's wife, Joyce acknowledged, strange though to her the type was. She petted and humoured the sick children as if she had been their mother. She sat by a bedridden woman and listened to a long rambling story about her illness and all its details, with every appearance of interest and unquestionable patience. And when the round was got through, she skipped out of the last house with the satisfaction of a child to have got its task over. 'Now let's have a run down to the river to see the boats, and then home to tea. You are going to stay with us for tea? I want a good fast nice walk to blow all the cobwebs out of my head.'

'But you must be tired. And it must make your heart sore.'

'You say that *sore* in such a pathetic way,' said Mrs. Sitwell, laughing and mimicking Joyce with her soft, low-toned, Scotch voice—an action which Joyce only detected after a minute or two, and which made her flush with a troubled sense of being open to ridicule. The sensation of being laughed at was also a thing to which she was entirely unaccustomed. 'But you can't help them unless you see what they want,' the parson's wife went on. 'And as half of them will cheat you if they can, and you must find out the truth from your own observation, not from what they tell you, you must simply put your heart in your pocket, and think nothing of its being *sore*. And as for being tired, I'm never tired, I have so many different things to do. If they were the same, I should die of it. We are going to have some fun to-night—we are going

to have "Angels ever Bright and Fair" to meet you. Oh ! don't you know what I mean by "Angels ever Bright and Fair" ? I mean Mr. Bright, our curate. He is the best little man in the world, and he is so pleased you agree with him, only putting it so much more nicely.' Then the little minnie changed her tone, and was more Bright than Mr. Bright himself. 'He shall sing that song of his for you, and he will try to make a little mild love to you, and it will all be great fun. But first let us go on to the bridge and have a look at the boats.'

CHAPTER XXVII

It was the afternoon of a brilliant summer day, and the Thames was full of water-parties going home, full of frolic and merriment, and pretty ladies in fine dresses, and men in flannels, in that *négligé* which Englishmen alone know how to make agreeable and pleasant to behold. The sight of all that pleasure had a pleasurable effect upon the parson's wife, though she had no share in it. And the charm of the scene—the river, struck full by the level sunshine which made it blaze, the colour and movement of the continually passing boats, the more tranquil river-people about—fishermen in their punts, who had sat there all day long, and looked 'as steadfast as the scene,' immovable like the trees that overhung the water—was delightful to Joyce, who had so soon acquired associations with that river, and to whom her two expeditions upon it were the most delightful of her life. She was leaning upon the bridge, looking over, watching the measured movement of the oars, as a party of small boats together swept down the stream, and thinking, not of them, but of her own water-party, and the strange enchantment in it—when she suddenly saw in one of the passing boats a figure which made her heart jump with sudden excitement. It was Captain Bellendean, who was standing up in the stern of the boat behind a gay party of ladies, steering, which was a difficult operation enough at that moment. He was too much absorbed in his occupation to look up, but Joyce had no difficulty in identifying him. His outline, his attitude, would have been enough for her quick eyes; his face was almost stern in the intentness with which he was surveying the river, guiding the deeply-laden boat through the dangers of that passage, amid a crowd of other boats, many of them manned by very unskilful boatmen,—and entirely unconscious of her observation.

The sight of him gave the sensitive girl a curious shock. She

knew very well that his life was altogether apart from hers, that he must be engaged in many scenes and many pleasures with which she had nothing to do, and that the point at which their two lives came in contact at all was a very narrow one. She knew all this as well as it was possible to know such an evident matter of fact; and yet, somehow, this sudden proof of it, and sight of him passing her by, unconscious of her existence, in the society to which, and not to her, he belonged, had an effect upon Joyce altogether out of proportion to the easiness of the incident. Where had he been? Who were the people who were with him? Had it been as delightful to him as when he had made it a scene of enchantment and delight to her? She did not ask herself these questions. She only recognised in one swift moment that there he was in his own life, altogether unaware of, and unconcerned by, hers. The shock, the recognition, the instant identification of all these facts, were complete in a moment—the moment which it took the boat, propelled by four strong pairs of arms, to shoot within the shadow of the bridge—and no more.

‘Why! wasn’t that your friend, Captain Bellendean, standing up steering that big boat?’ Mrs. Sitwell said.

Joyce had a curious sensation as if she were standing quite alone, separate from all the world, and that this was some ‘airy tongue that syllables men’s names’ echoing in her ears. She heard herself murmur as if she too were but a voice, ‘Yes, I think so’—while the glowing river and the drooping trees, and all the gleams of mingled colour, melted and ran into each other confusedly like the mists of a dream.

‘I am sure it is. What a wonderful thing when one has all sorts of things to do, to watch those people who have nothing to do but amuse themselves! He has been philandering about with his ladies all day, and probably he will be out at half-a-dozen parties, or lounging in his club half the night—and the same thing to-morrow and to-morrow. Well, on the whole, you know I think it must be dull, and not half so good as our own hard-working life,’ Mrs. Sitwell said; but she sighed. Then turning upon Joyce with a sudden laugh—‘I forgot you were one of the butter-flies too.’

‘Oh no,’ said Joyce, ‘only twice’—thinking of those enchanted afternoons upon the water, and having only half emerged from the curious haze of enlightenment, of realisation, if such a paradox may be, which had surrounded her. She thought, but was not sure, that her companion laughed at this inconsequent reply. Only twice! How strange it was that these two frivolous water-

parties—mere pleasure, meaning nothing—should have taken such a place in her life, more than all the hard work of which Mrs. Sitwell (with a sigh) asserted the superiority! The school, the labours in which Joyce had delighted, her aspirations, her Shakespeare class, had all melted away and left no trace; while the Thames with its pleasure-boats, the mingled voices of the rowers and their companions, the tinkle of the oars, the sunshine on the water, appeared to her like the only realities in the haze of her present life. They came back to her with the most astonishing distinctness when this sudden glimpse, which felt like a revelation, but was not—how could it be so?—rather the most ordinary circumstance, the most natural accident, befell her. It was at least a revelation to her; for it showed her how distinctly she remembered every incident, every detail, every word that had been spoken; how the Captain had handed her into the boat; how she had been placed near him, her father on the other side; how he had bent over his oar, speaking to her from time to time; how the others had called to him by the name of Stroke—which at first Joyce had supposed to be a playful nickname, not knowing what it meant—to mind his business, to take care what he was about. Joyce did not know why, but had a curious dazzled sense of his eyes upon her face, of his attention to her every movement, of the curious change in everything when she was drawn into the other boat on the way back, and the cloud that had come over his eyes. All these things were as a picture or a dream to her, not things she remembered as having been, but which seemed to go on and continue and be, like an enchanted world, which, having once come into existence, could never cease.

Only twice! but remaining always—so that she could go back at her pleasure, and float again upon the enchanted stream, and hear again the merry mingled voices, the one of deeper tone sounding through. She recognised with a strange confusion that this sudden, unexpected sight of Captain Bellendean steering another boat, with another crew, disturbed the previous image in her mind in some unexplainable way. It was like the sudden plunge of a stone into the midst of a still water full of reflections, breaking up the reflected images, spreading vague circles of confusion through the lovely unreal world that had been there. It was unreal altogether, everything, both that which had been before and that which now was.

Joyce walked back very soberly by Mrs. Sitwell's side, vaguely listening to the lively strain of talk, which conveyed scarcely any idea to her mind—hearing, answering, knowing nothing, feeling

as if the many-sided practical life in which her companion was so busy, was an unfortunate and troublesome unreality, breaking into experiences so far more vivid and true. She was glad to be rid of Mrs. Sitwell for a moment when they reached the house, where Joyce was to be entertained at tea.

While its mistress flew about seeing that all was ready, Joyce sat down, thankful to be alone, very happy to find silence and stillness round her, even in the little shabby sitting-room, with the faded ornamental desk and the mystery of the photographs at the other end. She wanted to think, to make it all out, to realise what had happened. What had happened! and yet nothing had happened at all. She had seen a boat floating down, with a score of others, passing under the bridge; and what was that to her or to any one? A boat passing, a water-party going down the river, and nothing more. But this was not how it appeared to Joyce: thinking is one thing and seeing another. Whatever she might say to herself, what she continued to see was the Captain standing up in the stern of the long boat, with the steerage-ropes in his vigorous hands, with that pretty group of ladies in the shadow of his erect figure,—another world, another life of which she knew nothing at all. Norman Bellendean had by no means neglected his new friends. Only two days before he had appeared in the afternoon, and had filled the place with that something which Joyce did not understand—that influence and personality which seemed to soften all tones and warm all tints, and charm the common day into miraculous brightness. She said to herself that this was society—that interchange of thoughts and feelings which had always appeared to her the most desirable thing in the world. That she should have found the charm in the sole possession of a cavalry officer—who was, it is true, at the same time, a country gentleman, and the lord and superior of the place which had been her early home, and in which everybody regarded him with an interest half feudal, half friendly—did not surprise her, though a cooler head might have found it a very surprising thing. Joyce believed that Mrs. Bellendean produced the same charmed atmosphere around her. They were the symbols of all higher intelligence and finer breeding, and she was not as yet in any way undeceived, nor suspected any other influence in the delightfulness of the Captain's visits—a delight which had begun with the very first of them, and which had never failed. It was not, therefore, any kind of jealousy which had sprung up in her mind, even unconsciously. She did not suspect among the ladies in that boat some special one who might have all his best looks and words

aside. Her mind was not at all in that conscious phase. She only realised with a curious consternation that he lived his life in another world—that the days when he was absent were to him the same as other days, though to her lost in mystery and the unknown. Where he spent them, with whom he was, mattered nothing. She was not even curious as to who his companions were. The wonder, the shock, consisted in the fact that his life had another side to her absolutely unknown.

In all this there was no pang of jealous love. She was unaware that there was love in it, or anything save wonder and disappointment, and a strange realisation of difference and separation. She did not know where he had been, or who were with him: he might have passed her very door—the other side of the hedge—and she would have been none the wiser. She knew him so well, and yet not at all. Something of the astonishment with which the primitive traveller recognises the existence of a hundred circles of human creatures altogether beyond his ken, who must have gone on living for all those years totally outside of his knowledge, filled her now. The thought affected her with fantastic pain, and yet she had not a word to say against it. Her heart made a claim all unconsciously upon those people who had first awakened its sympathies; and to pass him on the road, as it were, like this, he not even seeing her, unexpectant of her appearance, like two strangers, out of reach of even a passing salutation, was more strange, more overpowering, more enlightening, than anything, she thought, that had ever happened before.

The tea after this was bewildering and rather tedious to Joyce. She wanted to get away to think over her new discovery by herself, and instead she was compelled to share in an evening of lively wit and laughter, solidified by much parish talk. A churchwarden, who was no more than a local tradesman—though one of the ‘best people’—and much overawed by finding himself there—and good Miss Marsham, were of the party. Mrs. Sitwell’s voice ran through the whole like the *motif* of a piece of music, never lost sight of. ‘You must sing, Mr. Bright, as soon as you have recovered your voice a little after tea. Eating, we all know, is very bad for the voice: we will give a little time for tired nature to restore herself, and then the songster must be heard. Miss Hayward has never heard you, don’t you know.’

‘I am not very much to hear. Miss Hayward would not lose much if she remained in that state of deprivation.’

‘Oh, we don’t think so,—do we, Mr. Cosham? What would the choir do without him? By the way, that dear boy of yours is

coming on famously. He must have a solo in the anthem on our Saint's day. He is quite like a cherub in his white surplice. That is one thing the Canon envies us. He would give his little finger to have a surpliced choir—but they won't let him! Though he is so tyrannical to us, he has to knock under to all the old women who sit upon him. They call it sitting under him, but I don't. Do you, Mr. Cosham?

'Really, ma'am,' said the churchwarden, with his mouth full, 'you put it so funnily, one can't help laughing;' and with humility, putting up his hand to conceal it, he indulged in an apologetic roar.

'Oh, let's laugh a little—it does nobody any harm,' said the parson's wife. 'What I should delight in would be to have a band for the festival: it might be amateur, you know; there are so many amateurs about the world that want nothing for it—that are too glad to be allowed to play.'

'And oh, so badly,' said Mr. Bright.

'Not always so very badly—especially when it is strings. Don't you think we might have a band, Mr. Cosham, so long as it was strings? it would be such an attraction—with a solo from your dear little boy.'

'I think it would be a great attraction; what do you think, sir?' said the churchwarden, looking towards the chief authority. Mr. Sitwell shook his head.

'Perhaps we think too much of outside attractions when our minds should be set upon higher influences; but if you think the people would like it——'

'It helps a deal with the collection—does a band,' said the churchwarden. 'There's a church I know where they have the military band, and the place is crowded, with people standing outside the doors.'

'Not from the best of motives, I fear,' said the parson, still shaking his head; 'but to get them to come is something, by whatever means.'

'That's what I think—like Mrs. Sitwell; and a brass band——'

'Oh no, Mr. Cosham!—strings! strings!' cried the lady. 'A brass band is a deal too noisy.' She turned upon the unsuspecting man eyes which had suddenly become dull round orbs like his own, and spoke with the very echo of his voice. 'It would drown Johnny's voice, bless him!' the little mimic cried. Mr. Cosham, good man, thought there was something a little strange and thick in this utterance; but he did not understand the convulsion of

suppressed laughter on the curate's face, nor the smile that curled about the corners of Mr. Sitwell's mouth. These signs of merriment disturbed him a little, but he did not suspect how. He turned to the ladies, who were quite grave, and replied with much sincerity—

'That's quite true, ma'am—it's wonderful how you do see things; it *would* drown Johnny's voice—and he's got a sweet little pipe of his own, and pleased and proud his mother would be to hear him in church.'

'The boys' voices are like angels,' said Miss Marsham; 'they're sometimes naughty little things, but their voices are like heaven. But I can't help saying, though I don't like to disagree with you, that I'm not fond of a band in church.'

'What! not strings?' cried Mrs. Sitwell, with such an air of ingenuous and indeed plaintive surprise, that the tender-hearted woman was moved in spite of herself.

'Well—perhaps strings are different,' she answered, with hesitation.

'We never thought of anything else: when our kind friend said brass, it was only a slip of the tongue. You meant violins all the time, Mr. Cosham, didn't you?' said the parson's wife, with her appealing gaze, which made the churchwarden blush with emotion and pleasure.

'I believe I did, ma'am,' he said doubtfully. 'I'm sure that's what's right if you say so: for naturally being so musical yourself, you know about these things better than me.'

'Dear,' said Mrs. Sitwell, addressing Joyce, whom she no longer called Miss Hayward, but whom she did not yet venture, in sight of a certain dignity of silence and reserve about that young woman, to call, except in her absence, by her Christian name,—'you never give us your opinion on anything. Do give us your opinion; we have all said our say.'

'Indeed I don't know anything at all,' said Joyce—'nothing at all. I was never used to music—of that kind, in the church.'

'And yet,' said Mr. Sitwell, 'the Scottish Church has a fine ceremonial of her own, where she has not been deadened by contact with Dissent. I have always heard there were things in her service which went further and were more perfect than anything attempted here—until quite recently. But of course there is always a tendency to be deadened by the atmosphere of Dissent.'

The party all listened very respectfully to this, which had almost the weight of an oracular statement. Joyce, for her part, was more bewildered than ever. The words he used bore to her

a completely different meaning, and she was not sufficiently instructed to be aware of that which he intended to express. She understood the Canon when he asked her if she was a horrid little Presbyterian, but she had no comprehension of what Mr. Sitwell meant. She was wise enough, however, to be silent, and keep her ignorance to herself.

'But we all believe the same in the chief points, after all,' said Miss Marsham, laying her thin hand caressingly on Joyce's arm. This kind lady could not bear the girl to be distressed if, perhaps, she might happen to be one of those who had been deadened by the atmosphere of Dissent.

'Well, now that this great question is settled, and we are to have the band and Johnny's solo—and mind you keep him in good voice, Mr. Cosham—let us go upstairs and have "Angels ever Bright and Fair." We are so fond of "Angels ever Bright and Fair,"—aren't we, Austin?' cried the parson's wife, putting her hand through her husband's arm and looking up in his face. He laughed and put her away with a little pat. 'You are incorrigible, Dora,' he said. Mr. Bright lifted his eyebrows and looked at the others, asking why.

And then there followed songs and sallies, and bits of that involuntary mimicry of everybody in turn which the lively mistress of the house seemed to be unable to keep under. Joyce saw her assume a serious aspect, with a grave face and a little movement about her lips, as she said something in slow and soft tones, at which Miss Marsham did not laugh, but once more laid her thin hand tenderly upon Joyce's arm, while the gentlemen did,—the churchwarden bursting out in a short abashed roar, while Mr. Bright went off to a corner, and Mr. Sitwell hid his face with his hand. This little pantomime perplexed Joyce much, but it was not till after that she realised how she herself had been 'taken off' for the amusement of her friends.

She got home at last in the dusk of the summer night, feeling as if the world were full of a babble of voices, and of jests, and of calculations and little intrigues, and attempts to do something unnamed by means of something else. Joyce had not been altogether unaware that all was not perfectly straightforward and true in the world before. She had been fully acquainted with the extraordinary little deceptions and stories made up by children to save themselves from punishment, or to procure some pleasure, or even for nothing at all—out of pleasure apparently in the mere invention; but these little falsities were of altogether a different kind, and her brain throbbed with the contact of so many unac-

customed trifles which were like the buzz of the flies in the air. The piquancy of mimicking an individual in his own presence, though she was not insensible to the fact, was strange to her serious soul: it helped to increase the queer unreality of this world in which she found herself, where there were droll little plays going on on all sides upon somebody's weakness, from the silly correspondents of the *Pictorial* to the rich soap-boiler who was to be wheedled by praise of his house, and the humble churchwarden who was bound hand and foot in reverential servility by praise of his boy—and people who were to be brought to church by the attraction of a band as being better than not going at all. And what was it for? For the parsonage? Joyce was not so hard a critic as to believe this. She saw the good parson tired with his day's work, and she had seen that kind mischievous little woman as good as an angel to the poor people. Their meaning at the bottom was good, and the parsonage only an incident in the strong desire they both had to make the district of St. Augustine's as near perfection as possible, and chase all sorrow and sickness and trouble out of it, and set up a beautiful service, and steal the people's hearts with angelic voices in the choir and celestial thrilling of violin-strings—to steal their hearts, but only for God, or for what they thought God,—for the Church at least. This part of it Joyce but faintly comprehended, yet more or less divined.

And then from the conception she dimly attained of this real and great motive, her mind came down again to the laughter and the mimicry and the photographs, and that perplexing utterance about an atmosphere deadened by Dissent. What a strange world it was! making good things look bad by dint of trying to get good out of evil! Joyce wondered whether it would not succeed better to reject the artifices, and try what simple means would do. And then having shaken off that coil, her mind suddenly returned with a spring to what was for herself the central event of this day—the Captain standing up in that boat among those unknown people, in that other world. Strange! and he was her friend—but yet belonged to her no more than the river itself flowing on its way, with so many other lawns to reflect besides that little bit of green which Joyce, watching the stream go by, had begun to think of as her own. But it was not hers, and neither was he. Bellendean had been hers, and her old people, and——Joyce hurried her steps to get refuge in her father's house from that shadow which began to start up in her path and look at her, and filled her with alarm—a shadow demure and serious, with no thought of other worlds or other influences strong enough to eclipse his own.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE next scene in which Joyce found herself which broke the ordinary routine of her life was the great garden-party at the soap-boiler's, which was all that the poor Sitwells had got out of their supposed great demonstration and triumph of the school-feast. Sir Samuel Thompson lived in a large mansion on the hill overlooking the whole panorama of the Thames valley, with its winding river and happy woods—a scene enchanting enough to have satisfied any poet, and which this rich and comfortable person looked upon with much complacency, as in a manner belonging to himself, and deriving a certain importance from that fact. He was a man who was fond of great and costly things, and it seemed natural to him that his windows should command the best thing in the way of a view that was to be had near enough London to be valuable. And it gave him much satisfaction to gather around him all 'the best people' from miles round: it was pleasant thus to be able to prove the value of money, which was the thing that had made him great, and which he liked to glorify accordingly. 'They all knock under to it in the end,' he was fond of saying. 'They think a deal of themselves and their families, and rank and all that, but money's what draws them in the end.' And Sir Sam was right. Some people came because his house was a show house, and his table the most luxurious of any far or near; and some because to see him swelling like a turkey-cock in the midst of his wealth was funny; and some by that indefinable attraction which wealth has, which brings the most rebellious to their knees: at all events, everybody came.

Sir Sam was, to use his own phraseology, the chief partner in his own concern. Nobody remarked Lady Thompson. She was not the leader of the expenditure and display, as the wife of a self-made man so often is. She was a homely stout little person, who did not love her grandeur—who would have been far happier in

the housekeeper's room. Even in the finest dresses—and she had very fine dresses—there was to understanding eyes the shadow of an apron, a sort of ghostly representation of a soft white comfortable lay to which a child might cling, where stockings to be darned might lie. She stood a step behind Sir Sam to receive their guests. He said, 'How do you do? hope I see you well. Hope you've brought a large party—the more the merrier; there's plenty of room for all;' while she only shook hands with the visitors and beamed upon them. She went everywhere with her husband, but always in this subsidiary capacity. And Sir Sam was by no means reluctant to bestow the light of his countenance. It was not so difficult a thing to persuade him to appear at an afternoon party as the deluded Sitwells had supposed. He liked to show himself and his fat horses and his carriage, which was the last and newest and most comfortable that had ever been fashioned. But there he stopped. He took a cup of tea from any one; but if they thought to get anything more in return they were mistaken, and justly too,—for why should a millionaire's good offices be purchased by a cup of tea? He had the right on his side.

This poor Mrs. Sitwell found when she made her anxious and at last desperate attempt to gain his ear. To waste his attentions upon the wife of the incumbent of St. Augustine's did not in the least commend itself to Sir Sam. He was not aware that she was amusing, and could take off all his friends; and he thought with justice that she was not worthy to be selected out from that fine company only because she had asked him to her school-feast. In return for the cup of tea offered to him there—which he did not drink—he had asked her and her husband to his gorgeous house, and put it within their power to drink tea of the finest quality, coffee iced and otherwise, claret-cup or champagne-cup; and to eat ices of various kinds, cakes, fruit, grapes, which at that time of the year, had they been sold, would have been worth ever so much a pound. Sir Sam thought he had given the parson of St. Augustine's and his wife a very ample equivalent for their cup of tea.

Joyce went to this great gathering in Mrs. Hayward's train, as usual, following—with a silence and gravity which were gradually acquiring for her the character of a very dignified and somewhat proud young woman—her stepmother's active steps. She knew a few people now, and silently accepted offered hands put out to her as she bowed with a smile and response to the greeting, but no more. The crowd was no longer a blank to her. She did not now feel as if left alone and among strangers when, in the course

of Mrs. Hayward's more brilliant career, she was left to take care of herself. On this occasion it was not long before she saw the portly Canon swinging down upon her, with the lapels of his long coat swinging too, on either side of the round and vast black silk waistcoat. She had been watching, with a disturbed amusement, the greetings made at the corner of a green alley between Mrs. Jenkinson and Mrs. Sitwell. They had been full of cordiality—the elder lady stooping to give the younger one a dab upon her cheek, which represented a kiss. 'I could not think it was you,' Mrs. Jenkinson said; 'I have been watching you these ten minutes. How are you, and how are the dear children? I am very pleased to see you here. I did not know you knew the Thompsons.'

'Oh yes; very well indeed,' said the parson's wife, with a beaming smile. 'What a pretty party it is!'

'A party cannot well fail to be pretty when it is given in such gardens as these; and with such a house behind it, flowing with wine and oil.'

'You mean with ices and tea. It's very fine, no doubt; but I like something humbler, that one can call one's own, quite as well.'

'No one should attempt these parties,' said Mrs. Jenkinson, 'who has not a large place to give them in, and plenty of things going on—tennis and all that, or music, or a beautiful prospect: we have them all here.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Sitwell, 'we did very well indeed, I assure you, in Wombwell's field. You did not do me the honour to come, but everybody else did—the Thompsons and all.'

'Really,' Mrs. Jenkinson said. She added pointedly, feeling that she was not a match for the lively and nimble person with whom she was engaged—'It must, I fear, have been very expensive.'

'Oh, not at all,' said the parson's wife. 'You see, we gave nothing but tea. People don't come for what they get, though dear Sir Sam thinks so; they come to see other people, and meet their friends, and spend the afternoon pleasantly. Don't you think so, dear Mrs. Jenkinson? If I had the smallest little place of my own, with a little bit of a garden, such as we might have if there ever is a parsonage to St. Augustine's, I should not be at all afraid to ask even the Duchess to tea. She would come for me, she is such a dear,' Mrs. Sitwell said.

'I am afraid I am not half so courageous,' the Canon's wife replied; and she added quickly, 'There is Lady St. Clair; excuse

me, I must say a word to her,' and hastened away. She was routed, horse and foot; for Mrs. Jenkinson did not know the Duchess, and this little district incumbent, this nobody, this scheming, all-daring little woman, actually did, by some freak of fortune,—and probably would have the audacity—and succeed in it, as such sort of persons so often do—to ask that great lady to tea.

The Canon swooped down upon Joyce after this little scene was over. She was standing by herself, only half-seeing the fun, perhaps because her sense of humour was faint, perhaps only because of her vague understanding of all that lay underneath, and made it funny. He took her hand and drew it within his arm. 'Here you are, you little rebel,' he said. 'I have got you at last. There is nobody eligible within sight. Come and take a walk with me.'

Joyce had very little idea what he meant by some one eligible; but she was very well content to be led away, hurrying her own steps to suit the swinging gait of the big Churchman. He led her through the green alleys and broad walks of the soap-boiler's magnificent grounds to the mount of vision which crowned them. 'There now! look at that view,' he said, 'and tell me if you have anything like it in Scotland. You brag us out for scenery, I know; but where did you ever see anything like that?'

Joyce looked up in his face for a moment, then answered, with a smile, 'I like as well to see the Craggs below Arthur's Seat, and the sea coming in ayont them.'

'Eh!' cried the Canon, lifting his brows. 'What do you mean by that? You don't generally speak like that.'

With nobody was Joyce so much at her ease as with this big impetuous man. 'There was once,' she said, in the tone, half bantering, half reproachful, with which she had once been wont to recall her 'big' class to the horror of having forgotten something in Shakespeare, 'a little Scotswoman whose name was Jeanie Deans.'

'Eh!' cried the Canon again; and then he pressed, with half angry affectionateness, the hand that was on his arm. 'Oh, you are at me with Scott!' he said—'taking a base advantage; for it's a long time since I read him. So Jeanie Deans said that, did she? I don't remember much about her. They say Scott is played out, you know, in these days.'

'Then, sir,' said Joyce quickly, 'they say what they don't understand; for look how it comes to me just as the natural thing to say. Sir Walter knew—he and some others, they know almost

like God—what is in the hearts of the common people that have no words to speak.'

'Ah!' said the Canon; and then he laughed and added, 'So you are one of the common people that have no words to speak? It's not the account I should have given of you. Sit down here, and let's pluck our crow. You have gone entirely off, you little schismatic, to the other side.'

'No,' said Joyce.

'No! how can you tell me no, when I know to the contrary? You've been out in the district visiting with her. You are going to undertake something about the schools. They've had you to tea in company with the curate and that fat dolt Cosham whom they lead by the nose. Oh, you wonder how I know! My dear,' said the Canon, with a slight blush, if it is to be supposed that a canon can blush, 'a clergyman in a country parish knows everything—whether he will or not. Now, isn't it true?'

'Yes, it is quite true,' said Joyce; and then she added, looking up at him again with a smile, and a little rising colour, caused by what she felt to be her boldness, 'But still I like you best.'

'My dear girl,' cried the Canon. He patted her shoulder with his large white hand, and Joyce saw with astonishment a little moisture in his big eyes. 'I always knew you were an exceeding nice little girl,' he said. 'I took a fancy to you the first time I met you. It gives me the greatest pleasure that you should like me best. But, my dear, why do you go over to the other side if you are so wise and discerning and sensible as to prefer me?'

Joyce hesitated a little, and then she said, 'They wish very much to do everything that is best.'

'Eh?' the Canon cried, this time in astonished interrogation.

'They want to do good to everybody,' said Joyce, in her slow soft voice, which to ears accustomed to lighter and louder tones had an air of being very emphatic. 'They would like to make their parish perfect.'

'District,' said the Canon.

'District—but I don't know the difference; and I don't know many of the things they want to do. I was not brought up that way. Many things they say are all dark to me; but what they want in their hearts is to do good to everybody. They would like to have their church service and everything perfect.'

'High ritual, as they call it,—music and all sorts of fal-lals.'

'And to get everybody to come,' continued Joyce, 'and to teach everybody, and to help the poor folk. I could not do it that way,' she added, shaking her head, 'but to them it's the right

way. They have no other thought but to be good and do their best.'

'Oh!' said the Canon, this time in a dubious and disturbed tone.

'They go among the poor folk every day,' said Joyce; 'they would like to take the command of them, and give them everything, and guide them altogether. It is not—oh, not my way—not our way at all, at home; but they say it is the way here. They never spare themselves any trouble. They would like to take it all on their shoulders; to nurse all the ill people, and mend all the bad ones, and even cut out all the clothes for the poor little things that have none. They will sometimes do things that look as if they were—very different: but it is all for this end.'

'For making themselves important, and proving their own merit, and last, but not least, getting themselves that parsonage about which they make my life a burden to me. Why, your father has taken it up now—that must be your doing. These people, though your excellent sense keeps you from liking them, are taking you in, my dear. The parsonage—that's what they're aiming at.'

'And why not?' said Joyce.

'Eh?' The Canon turned round upon her with a snort of impatience. Then he elevated his large hands, and gave forth a still larger sigh. 'You women are so gullible,' he said; 'you believe whatever is told you.'

'I believe,' said Joyce, 'that it would be better to have a house of your own, and not to pay rent when you have very little money for one that lets in the rain, and is very, very small—so small, it would scarcely hold you,' she said, looking at her companion.

'It is fortunate I haven't got to live in it,' he said.

'Very fortunate—for you. But, sir,' said Joyce, feeling more and more the authority and power of this big friendly man, like a very kind inspector in the old days—'you are far more fortunate than they are. You are like a prince to them. You have everything you want—money and honour, and a beautiful house, and plenty of room, and power to do what you please. They say in my country, "It is ill talking between a full man and a fasting,"—if you understand that.'

The Canon humphed and shook his head, and then he laughed and said, 'Oh yes, I understand that. So I am the full man and Sitwell the empty one, you think, Miss Joyce.'

'It makes a great difference,' said Joyce; 'and then they think—that it was promised to them before they came here.'

'Yes,' said the Canon, after a pause, 'it *was* promised to them in a way—before they showed what sort of free-lances they were.'

'And that makes a sense of wrong,' said Joyce, wisely taking no notice of the last remark. 'If you think there is an injustice, it always hangs on the heart.'

'The Canon is 'ere before us,' said the fat voice of Sir Samuel, as the sound of much scattering of the gravel under heavy feet broke suddenly upon this colloquy; 'and I would say, by the looks of them, that this young lady has been a-lecturing the Canon. Good joke that, preaching to the Canon, that most times 'as it all his own way.'

Sir Sam's laugh was a little asthmatic—it shook him subterranously and in a succession of rolling echoes. 'Good joke that, preaching to the Canon,' he went on, as if his announcement of the fact was the climax of the joke. He was followed by Mrs. Jenkinson, tall and energetic, wrapped in a white *chudder*, the softest and most comfortable of shawls—and by Lady Thompson, panting and red in the face with the climb, and gorgeous in all the colours of the rainbow. The Canon made room for the two ladies on the bench, and Sir Sam got a garden-chair and seated himself in front of them, against the view which they had come to see, half shutting it out with his bulky person. But the view was no novelty to any there.

'Yes,' said the Canon, 'it is quite true. This little thing has been lecturing me. Indeed I don't hesitate to say she's been giving it me hot and strong—about the Sitwells,' he added, in a sort of aside to his wife.

'I must say,' said that lady indignantly, 'I think that young ladies should keep their hastily-formed opinions to themselves. What can she know about the Sitwells that we don't all know?'

'Well, she says she likes us best,' said the Canon, quite irrelevantly; 'so it's not from partiality, or taking their side.'

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Jenkinson, darting a glance of anger mingled with a certain respect at the girl, whom she immediately set down as a foeman worthy of her steel.

'She says they're very hard-working people, working at their district night and day. She doesn't understand their ways (she's Scotch, you know), but she sees they mean the best by their people—hush for a moment, my dear. And she says that they think they were promised a parsonage, and that this makes a sense

of wrong. Well, you know, she's about right there—they were promised a——'

'Before any one knew what they were—before we understood all the schemes and designs—the setting up to be something altogether above—the ridiculous fuss about everything—the flowers and the lights and the surpliced choir, and Bach's music, with little Johnny Cosham to sing the soprano parts—if she doesn't do it herself, as I verily believe she does, done up in a surplice and put at the end of the row : such a thing as was never heard of!'

'Well, my dear—well, my dear! Joyce here,' patting her hand, 'who has no sympathy with all that (being Scotch, you know), says they mean it all well, to get people to go to church. And they do get a number of that hopeless lot down by the river to go. But, however, that's not the question ; they were promised a parsonage if they got on and stayed a year or two. I can't say but what that's quite true.'

The Canon looked at Sir Samuel, and Sir Sam looked at the Canon. The rich man's countenance fell a little in harmony with that of his oracle, and he replied subdued, 'I don't say neither but what it's true.'

'She says it makes a sense of wrong : well, perhaps it does make a sense of wrong. We have very nice houses, Sir Samuel,—mine naturally not magnificent like yours, but on the whole a nice, comfortable, old-fashioned place.'

'Oh, very nice,' sighed Lady Thompson, who till now had been recovering herself, and had just got back her voice ; 'nicer than this, Canon, if you were to ask me.'

There was a pause, and the two pairs looked at each other, a little conscious, pleased with their own good fortune, feeling perhaps a little prick of conscience—at all events aware that a moral was about to be drawn.

'Well, and what then?' Mrs. Jenkinson said at last, in her highest pitch of voice.

Nobody spoke until Joyce said timidly, 'They would be happier, and she would not scheme any more. The rain comes in upon the little children.' She had half said 'bairns,' which was not at all Joyce's way, and she changed the word, which would have been very effective if she had but known. 'There is no room for the little children.'

'People in such circumstances 'as no business with children. I always said so,' said Sir Sam, with a wary eye upon his spiritual director, of whose opinion he stood much in awe.

Joyce was as innocent and ignorant as a girl should be. She lifted up her fair serene brow with no false shame upon it, knowing none. 'How can they help that?' she said. 'It is God that sends the children, not the will of men.'

'Oh, my pretty dear!' cried Lady Thompson, who was so homely a woman, reaching across Mrs. Jenkinson's prim lap to seize Joyce's hand. 'Oh, my dear!'—with tears in her homely eyes—'however you knows it, that's true.'

Mrs. Jenkinson did not say a word: emotion of this kind is contagious, and these two women, though without another feature in common, were both childless women, and felt it to the bottom of their hearts.

'Canon,' said Sir Sam, with a slight huskiness in his voice, 'if you're of that opinion I've got a cheque-book always 'andy. It was an understood thing, so far as I can remember. There was to be an 'ouse.'

'Yes, there was to be an 'ouse,' the Canon replied, without any intention of mimicry. At this moment of feeling he could not reprove the soap-boiler even by too marked an accentuation of the *h* which he had lost. He turned to his wife as he rose to accompany the soap-boiler, laying his hand upon Joyce's shoulder. 'This child has got very pretty turns of phraseology,' he said. 'Her Scotch is winning. You should have heard one or two things she said.'

'Oh, go away, Canon!' cried his wife. 'She is just a pretty girl, and that is what you never could resist in your life.'

Thus Joyce's first interference, and attempt to ascertain whether plain truth might not be more effectual than scheming, ended fortunately, as such attempts do not always do. It was her first appearance separately in the society of the new world she had been so strangely thrown into. But she had not time for much more, and perhaps it was as well. Such a success may happen once in a way, but it is seldom repeated. She was found sitting on that garden-seat with those two ladies a short time afterwards by her father, who had come late, and who brought with him Captain Bellendean.

Joyce had not seen Bellendean since that curious moment when she stood a spectator and watched him like a stranger, passing with his friends, steering the laden boat with all the ladies down the river. She was as much startled by his appearance now as if some strange embarrassing thing, requiring painful explanations, had passed since last they met.

CHAPTER XXIX

MRS. HAYWARD decided that she would walk home.

For what reason?—for no reason at all, so far as she was aware ; only, apparently without knowing it, to help out the decisions of fate. There was a stream of other people going home, some of them walking too, as it was so lovely an evening. The air was the softest balm of summer, cool, the sun going down, soft shadows stealing over the sky, the river still lit with magical reflections—those reflections which are nothing, such stuff as dreams are made of, and yet more beautiful than anything in earth or heaven. The rose tints were in the atmosphere as well as the sky. When you turned a corner, the resistance of the soft air meeting you was as a caress—like the kiss with which one loving creature meets another as they pass upon their happy way. It was no longer spring indeed, but matured and full-blown summer, ready any morning, by a touch of north wind or early frost, to become autumn in a moment, but making the very best of her last radiant evening. The well-dressed crowd streamed out of the gates of Sir Samuel's great house on the hill, and then separated, flowing in little rills of white and bright dresses, of pleasant voices and talk, upon their several ways. Till then, of course, they had all kept together. Afterwards the little accidents, the natural effect of unequal steps and different pace, so arranged it that the older pair dragged behind, having still some good-byes to make, and that the other two, who had fallen together without any intention, went on before.

Joyce was always shy, but she had never been embarrassed by the presence of Norman Bellendean. She had been able even to laugh with him when the gloom of her arrival in this new sphere, and of her severance from the old, was heaviest upon her. She had the reassuring consciousness that he knew all about her, and could not be in any way deceived. No need of fictions to account for her, nor apologies for her ignorance, were necessary with him.

And she gave him from the first that most flattering proof of preference by being at her ease with him, when she was so with no one else. But there was something in the air to-night which suggested embarrassment—something too familiar, over-sweet. Mrs. Hayward and the Colonel did not feel this. They said to each other that it was a lovely evening, and then they talked of their own concerns. Joyce was not like them—the rose-tinted vapours on the sky had got into her very soul.

‘Was there ever such a sunset?’ said Norman Bellendean. ‘And yet, Miss Joyce, you and I remember something better still,—the long, long lingering of the warm days——’

‘In summer,’ she said, with a little catching of her breath, ‘when you never could tell whether there was any night at all.’

‘And when the night was better than the day, if better could be, and morning and evening ran into each other.’

‘And it was all like paradise,’ said Joyce, chiming in. Their voices were full of emotion, though they were speaking only of such unexciting things as the atmosphere and the twilight—two safe subjects surely, if any subjects could be safe.

‘It is not like that,’ Joyce added, with a little reluctance; ‘but still the river when the last flash of the sun is upon it, and all the clouds hanging like roses upon the sky, and the water glimmering like a glass, and making everything double like the swan——’

Norman was one of the unread. He did not know what swan it was that floated ‘double, swan and shadow,’ for ever and ever, since that day the poet saw it: but he understood the scene and the little failure of breath in the enthusiasm of her description with which Joyce spoke.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it was like that the other night—but there was a charm wanting.’

‘Oh,’ Joyce said, still breathless; and she added, with an impulse that was involuntary, beyond her power of control, not what she meant or wished to say—‘When you were up the river,—the other night—passing——’

Did she mean it as a reproach? He looked at her quickly. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it is true I passed—the very lawn, the enchanted place—and looked and looked, but did not see you.’

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘but I saw you, Captain Bellendean. I saw you go below the bridge steering. It was strange, among all the strange folk, and the boats coming and going, suddenly to see—a kent face.’

She laughed, in a curious embarrassed way, as if laughing at herself, yet with a rising colour, and eyes that did not turn to him,

rather avoided him. Norman had a sudden gleam of perception, and understood more or less the little fauciful shock which Joyce had received to see him pass.

'You could not think it more strange than I did,' he said, in an unconscious tone of self-defence, 'nor half so disagreeable. To pass with people I cared nothing for, the same way that has become associated to me with—with—— And to look perhaps as if it were just the same whether it was they or—others.'

He began with self-defence, but ended with an inflection of half complaint and subdued indignation in his tone.

'Indeed,' said Joyce, startled, 'I did not think——'

'Perhaps,' he said, 'you did not think about me at all, and I am a fool for supposing you did ; but if you thought for a moment that it was any pleasure to me to be there, apart from all that had made it delightful——'

'Oh,' cried Joyce, in an anxious effort not to understand this inference which flooded all her veins with a sudden rush of indescribable celestial delight, 'but the river was as bright as ever I saw it, and the sky like heaven ; and why should you not be happy—with your friends?'

He had given her a sensation more exquisite than any she had ever known in all her life ; and on her side she was giving him pain, and knew it, and was not ill-pleased to have it so. Such, as the old moralists would say, are the strange contradictions of human feeling ! He turned upon her an aggrieved expostulating glance.

'You think it was the same,* whoever my companions might be ? You don't understand what it was to me to be bound to the oar like the galley slaves, to listen to all their inane nonsense and their jokes, when my heart was in—oh, a very different place.'

'You have been all over the world, Captain Bellendean, you must remember so many other places—more beautiful than this.'

'Do you think that is what I mean ?' he said quickly, in a tone almost of irritation. Joyce knew very well it was not what he meant. But she had to defend herself with the first weapons that came in her way.

'Don't you know,' he said, after a pause, 'that this has been such a summer as I never had before ? I have been a great deal about the world, as you say. I have had many experiences : but never yet have I felt as I have felt this year. I never was romantic, nor had I much poetry in me. But I begin to think the poets are the fellows, after all, who understand best.'

'That is true, I am sure,' said Joyce in a subdued voice. She

was thankful to find something that she could say. She walked along mechanically by the Captain's side, feeling as if she were floating in some vague enchantment, not able to pause or realise anything, not able to escape, carried along by the delicious soft air which was breathing within her being as well as without, a rapture that could not be explained.

'I believe it is true—but I never thought so before. And the cause is that I never knew—you before,' the Captain said.

Did the people know who were passing? could they see in the faces of those two walking—nay, floating by, surrounded by a golden mist—what was being said between them? A vague wonder stole into Joyce's mind as she perceived dimly through that mist the face of a wayfarer going by. She herself but vaguely realised the meaning of the words. She understood their sentiment well enough,—felt it in that silent ecstasy that swept her along, but had no power to think or exercise her own faculties at all, only to let herself be carried on, and away.

'You have been the enchantment to me,' he said hurriedly; 'and now it is almost over, and I shall have to go away. The charm will be gone from everything. I don't know how I am to reconcile myself to the dull world and the long days—unless——'

'Captain Bellendean——' Joyce said faintly, hearing her own voice, as if it came from a long distance, feeling a vague necessity for a pause.

'Unless I may—come back,' he said. 'I must go home and put things in order—but it need not be for very long—if I may come back?'

There was something vaguely defective in these words, she could not tell what. For that very reason they relieved her, because they were not what they might have been. She came to herself as if she had touched the earth after that vague swaying, floating, in realms above the earth, in the soft delicious air.

'Surely,' she said, 'you will come back. There is no reason for not coming back.'

He, it seemed, had not felt that touch of reality which had brought Joyce out of her rapture. He was confused and floating still. 'I mean,' he said, 'not to return merely to town or—but to come back to this moment, to those days. I have never known anything like them. They have opened a new world to me: Joyce——'

'Captain Bellendean!'

'I mean no familiarity—no want of respect; could you think

so? The name came out without intention—only because I say it over, and over—— Joyce—I may come back?’

Surely the passers-by must see! He had turned and was looking at her with pleading eyes; while she, with the red of the western sky in her face, with the mist in her eyes, did not look at him, or make him any reply.

‘I don’t ask you to say more. This is not the place. I don’t want to disturb your mind,—only say I may come, and that you will not send me away?’

Her heart had sprung up and was beating loud. A terror of what the people on the road would think took possession of her. ‘No, it is not the place,’ she murmured, scarcely knowing what she said.

‘What could I do? there was no other: say I may——’

‘Bellendean!’ cried Colonel Hayward’s cheerful voice from behind; ‘are you coming in to have some dinner? You had better. Why, you are taking the way to the river, Joyce and you.’

‘I beg your pardon!’ cried Captain Bellendean, with a startled air. ‘I beg your pardon! I did not observe——’

‘Joyce should have observed,’ said Mrs. Hayward quietly. ‘It is nearly half-past seven. You cannot do less than stay to dinner—especially as I hear you are going away.’

‘I will, with many thanks,’ said Norman. He looked like a man waked out of a dream; and Mrs. Hayward hastened on, not without a sense of Christian charity, to let them have it out, as she said to herself. But they were now both awakened. The charm was broken, and the golden air dispersed. They walked on behind the elder pair to the door, and went in very gravely both of them, without another word said.

A more extraordinary evening never was. Joyce had known many agitated and unhappy ones within the last six months, but none like this, during which she saw everything through a haze of excitement, with something weighing on her eyelids—something murmuring in her ears—something which made it impossible for her to meet the light or clearly realise what was going on. There seemed a sort of dumb expectation in the air besides that curious sense of something arrested and untold that was in her own mind. Her step-mother looked at her with a question in her eyes, and even touched her with a half-caress as she went upstairs to prepare for dinner. Joyce did not know why, and yet had a sort of far-off perception of some meaning and kindness in it, which notwithstanding was half an offence. And when she came downstairs the haze had filled the dining-room, so that she could not see clearly

the face on the other side of the table—the face which did not look at her any more than she looked at him, and yet was keenly aware of every movement on her part, as she was of his. She herself scarcely spoke a word during the whole meal, and he not much,—not more than was necessary. The others went on with their ordinary conversation, which seemed to drift about upon the haze; names—the names with which Joyce's mind had been busy a little while before—floating about, falling now and then like stones, catching her vague attention. Sir Sam, the Canon, the Sitwells—who were they, all these people? It seemed so strange that any one could concern themselves with their vague affairs.

The dinner was very long, and yet flew like a dream; and then came the twilight drawing-room, the dimness outside, the evening chilled out of that heavenly warmth and calm. Joyce did not go out to-night as was her wont, though she could not tell why. She kept by Mrs. Hayward, sedately seated near a table, upon which there was work, as if that were her object. Captain Bellendean stood near her when the gentlemen came from the dining-room. There was not much light, and he stood up like a tall pillar, slightly inclining over her, a sort of Pisan tower, leaning, yet firm. If he had anything more to say to her, it was clear *that* was not the place, any more than the road with the Colonel and his wife behind. But he lingered there still, saying little, until Colonel Hayward had to say, 'I don't want to hurry you, Bellendean. You're always welcome, and my wife would give you a bed with pleasure; but if you *are* going by that train——' Then Captain Bellendean roused himself like a man startled out of a dream, and shook hands with them all. He said Good-bye, not Good-night; and when Joyce had seated herself again, all trembling after that pressure of her hand, which almost hurt her, he suddenly came back, and looked in at the door. Mrs. Hayward's back was turned: she had indeed gone out to the verandah to look at the moon, as she said afterwards. He looked in, then made one step to where Joyce was sitting, and took her hand and kissed it. 'Remember I am to come back!' he said, and then was gone.

'What did Bellendean forget? his gloves, or a book, or what was it?' the Colonel said, with some curiosity, when the door was closed and the visitor departed.

'I don't know,—I was in the verandah,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'What did he forget, Joyce?'

Joyce looked at them with a startled, guilty countenance, know-

ing what they had said, yet not knowing, and made no reply. She dared not move, nor speak, lest she should betray—what? There was nothing to betray, except that he was coming back, and that was no information—for of course he was coming back. She was very glad to escape to her room when the lawful time came for that, and Mrs. Hayward gave the signal, but had not the strength or courage even to rise from her seat till that signal was given, not knowing whether she would be able to walk straight, or to preserve her ordinary appearance if she relinquished, with both those eyes upon her, the support of her chair. She was vaguely sensible of Mrs. Hayward's inquiring looks, which were half indignant, half angry, as well. When they said good-night, her step-mother took her hand with a quick monitory touch. 'Have you anything to tell me, or would you like to speak to your father?' she said. Joyce gave her a wondering look, and said 'No.' 'I am not thrusting myself into your confidence: but tell your father,' Mrs. Hayward said again imperatively, with a gleam of excitement in her blue eyes. Then as Joyce made no response, her step-mother flung past her, flushed and indignant. 'I might have known better than to make any such appeal,' she cried angrily, and shut her door with a clang that rang through the silent house.

Joyce stole away very silently into her room, disturbed and full of trouble. What could she tell? there was nothing to tell. She felt guilty without having any reason for it, and very sorry to offend without knowing how to help it. Tell her father!—but when she had nothing to tell him! There was a grieved look on his countenance, too, when he said good-night. It was all a confusion, and wrong somehow; but what could she do? Disturbed by this, there was a moment of troubled uncertainty in Joyce's mind a longing to be pardoned, to say that she was sorry, that she was concealing nothing, which was, however, contradicted by the desire she had to be alone, and the shrinking even from a look which might penetrate her seclusion, and read the secret of her heart before she had spelled it out to herself. Softly, apologetically, with a sense of asking pardon, she closed her door and then sat down and came face to face with herself.

It was a very strange agitated meeting, as with some one she was unwilling to see and still more unwilling to question—some one who had a story to tell which would crush all the beginnings of peace and all the gleams of happiness that had been in Joyce's life. She thought in the confusion of her mind of De Musset's spectre, whom he had seen sitting by him in all the conjunctions

of his life—the being, *qui me ressemblait comme un frère* ; but Joyce's meeting with herself was more important than anything recorded by the poet. All trembling with the sensations she had gone through, her nerves vibrating with the strain, her energies all melted in the exquisite sense of happiness which had floated her away, and in the chill check of the real which had brought her to earth again, she had questions to revolve and discoveries to make such as she knew now she had avoided and turned away from. She was afraid to look into those eyes which were her own, and find out the secret there. She sat down, putting her candle on the table, without lighting any other, conscious that she preferred the darkness, and not even to see, if she could help it, what she must see,—what could not be hidden any more. What had she done? She had meant no harm, thought of nothing that was wrong, nor of injuring any one, nor of failing in her faith. If Joyce had been made to disclose her opinion of herself, she would have described herself as true and faithful—faithful above all things. She would not have claimed excellence, though she might think perhaps that there was that in her which was above the multitude ; but she would have claimed to be faithful and constant, not variable in her affections, true to the last, whatever temptation might come upon her.

Oh, strange delusion ! oh, failure beyond example ! when all the time she had failed, failed without knowing it, without meaning it, helplessly, like a fool and a traitor ! It all came upon her in a sudden scathing flash of consciousness, which seemed to scorch her drooping face. She, in whom Joyce had always felt such confidence, herself—she, betrothed and bound and beyond all possibilities of other sentiment—almost as much as a wife already in solemn promise and engagement—she ! heaven help her ! what had she done ? Her veins all swelled to bursting with the rush of her guilty blood. Horror and darkness enveloped her all around ; she hid her face in her hands, and her lips gave forth a low quivering cry. She—loved another man. It was all the worse for her that she had felt herself superior to all vagaries of passion, thought herself above them, and believed that her own half-shrinking acceptance of love was all that was consistent with a woman's dignity. She had thought this, and she thought it still—yet discovered that she had departed from it, thrown all those restraints to the winds, and loved—loved—Norman Belden ! • The discovery horrified, humiliated, crushed her to the ground, and yet sprang with an impulse of warmer life than she had ever known before through all the throbbing of her veins.

CHAPTER XXX

‘You must try and get her to tell you when you are out this morning,’ said Mrs. Hayward. ‘She is probably silent on account of me; but you are her father, and you ought to know.’

‘My dear,’ said the Colonel, ‘why should she be silent on account of you?’

‘Oh, we need not enter into that question, Henry. Get her to tell you; it will be a relief to her own mind when she has got it out.’

‘Perhaps, Elizabeth, after all, we are going too fast. Bellen-dean has always been very friendly. He came to see me, and sought me out as his old colonel, before there was any Joyce.’

‘So you think it’s for you!’ Mrs. Hayward cried. And then she added severely, ‘If we should be going too fast, and there has been no explanation, Henry, you must bring him to book.’

‘Bring him to book? I don’t know what you mean, Elizabeth,’ said the Colonel, with a troubled countenance.

‘You must not allow it to go on—you must put a stop to it—you must let him know that you can’t have your daughter trifled with. You must ask him his intentions, Henry.’

The Colonel’s countenance fell: he grew pale, and horror filled his eyes. ‘Ask him—his intentions! his intentions! Good Lord! I might shoot him if you like; but ask him—his intentions towards my daughter, Elizabeth! Good Lord!’ The Colonel grew red all over, and panted for want of breath. ‘You don’t know what you say.’

‘I—don’t know what I say? As good men as you have had to do it, Henry. You must not let a man come here and trifle with Joyce. Joyce must not be——’

‘I wish you would not bring in her name,’ cried the old soldier—‘a young woman’s name! I know what you say is for—for

our good, Elizabeth ; but I can't, indeed I can't—it's not possible. I ask a man—as if I meant to force him into—— My dear, you can't know what that means ; you can't say what you're thinking. I to put shame upon my own child !' The Colonel walked up and down the room in the greatest perturbation. 'I can't—I can't !' he said ; 'you must never think of such a thing again. I—Elizabeth ! Good Lord——!' He stopped. 'My dear, I beg your pardon. I don't mean to be profane—but to tell me—oh, good Lord !' the Colonel cried, feeling that no words were adequate to express the horror and incongruity of the suggestion.

Mrs. Hayward had stood watching him without any relaxation of her look. There was a certain vulgar fibre in her which was not moved by that incongruity. A faint disdain of his incapacity, and still more of his delicacy about his daughter's name, as if she were of more importance than any one else, was visible in her face. Who was Joyce that she was not to be warned, that her lover was not to be brought to book ? Mrs. Hayward, in that perpetual secret antagonism which was in her mind, though she disapproved of it and suffered from it, was more vulgar than her nature. She was ready to scoff at these prejudices about Joyce, though in her natural mind she would have herself shielded a young woman's name from every breath.

'I am speaking in Joyce's interests,' she said. 'I hope you don't want to break her heart.'

'Elizabeth, Elizabeth !' said the Colonel, 'I beseech you, don't talk like that. Why, you can't know, you can't, you don't realise what a girl is to a man, especially when he is her father. It's bad enough to think of her caring for one of those fellows at all ; but to break her heart—good Lord !—and for me to interfere, to call up a man to—to the scratch—to—— Oh, good Lord, good Lord !' cried Colonel Hayward, with a blush like a girl. 'I might shoot him and take the penalty, but you might as well ask me to—to shoot myself at once—as to do that : or to acknowledge that my child, that young creature, my Joyce——'

'You can't expect me to follow you in your raptures, Henry,' said his wife, sitting down at the breakfast-table, for this discussion had been held in the morning, before Joyce appeared : and at that moment the door opened and she came in, putting a stop to the conversation. She was paler than usual, and graver ; but the two were confused by her entrance, and for the moment so much taken up in concealing their own embarrassment, that they did not remark her looks. Joyce was very quiet, but she was not

unhappy. How could she be with the thrill of Norman Bellen-dean's voice still in her ears, and his last look, which meant so much, so clear before her? She was wrong, she was guilty; it might be that misery and shame should be her portion. She knew that she had failed to honour, if not to love, and that her way before her was very dark; but do what she would, Joyce could not force herself to be unhappy now. The first thing that had occurred to her when she opened her eyes upon the morning light was not any breach of faith or failure in duty, but that voice and those eyes with their revelation which made her heart bound out of all the shadows of the night. She was pale with all this agitation, uneasy even when she slept, distracted by spectres; but in the morning light she could not be wretched, however she tried. She was very quiet, however, much more so than usual; and the absence of that eager vitality which kept continual light and shadow on her sensitive face gave her a certain dignity, which was again enhanced by her complete unconsciousness of it. Her father cast a glance at her in this composed stateliness of aspect, and had to hasten away to the sideboard and cut at the ham to hide the horrified shame of his countenance. A creature like that to break her heart for any fellow! to be called upon to ask any man his intentions—*his* intentions—in respect to her! The Colonel hewed down the ham till his wife had to remonstrate. 'You are not cutting for a dozen people, Henry.' 'Oh, I beg your pardon my dear,' he cried, and came back to his seat very shamefaced with a small solitary slice upon his plate.

When the Colonel went out for his usual walk, with Joyce as his companion, Mrs. Hayward came after them to the door, and laid her hand significantly on her husband's shoulder. 'Now don't forget,' she said. Forget! as if he were likely to forget what weighed upon him like a mountain. He thought to himself that he would put off any allusion till the walk was half over; but the Colonel had not the skill nor the self-control to do this, the uneasy importance of his looks betraying something of his commission even to the dreamy eyes of Joyce. Had she been fully awake and aroused, she must have seen through all his innocent devices at the first glance.

'It was rather a pleasant party, yesterday,' he said, 'especially afterwards, when we were by ourselves.' The Colonel meant no bull, but had lost himself in a confusion of words.

'Yes,' said Joyce very sedately, without even a smile.

'By the way,' said the Colonel briskly, seizing the first means of avoiding for a little longer the evil moment, 'you did great

execution, Joyce. I don't know what you said to the Canon, my dear, but I think you accomplished in a minute what all the good people have been trying to do for weeks and weeks. What did you say ?

What did she say ? She gave her father a wondering look. Who was the Canon, it seemed to ask, and when was yesterday ? It looked a century ago.

'That is what I like to see a woman do,' cried the Colonel, rousing himself into enthusiasm for the sake of gaining a little time—'not making any show, but with a word of hers showing what's kind and right, and getting people to do it. That's what I like to see. You have done your friends the best turn they ever had done them in their life.'

'Was it so ?' said Joyce, with a faint smile. 'I am very glad ; but it was the Canon that was good to pay attention to the like of me.'

'The like of you !' cried the Colonel. 'I don't know the man that wouldn't pay attention to the like of you.' Then he got suddenly grave, being thus brought back headlong to the very subject which he had been trying to escape. 'Oh, I was going to say,' he added, with a look that was almost solemn—'I am afraid we shall miss him very much—I mean Norman Bellendean.'

'Yes,' said Joyce. He spoke slowly, and she had time to steady her voice.

'Perhaps you knew before that he was going, my dear ?'

'No,' she replied, feeling all the significance of these monosyllables, yet incapable of more.

'I thought he had perhaps told you—at least Elizabeth—Elizabeth thought he might have told you.'

'Why should he have told me ?' said Joyce, with an awakening of surprise.

The Colonel was full of confusion. He did not know what to say. He felt guilty and miserable, like a spy, and yet he was faithful to his *consigne*, and to the task that had been set him to do. 'Indeed,' he said, in his troubled voice, 'my dear, I don't know ; but it was thought—I mean I thought, perhaps, that it would be a comfort to you—if you could have a little confidence in me.'

Joyce began to perceive dimly what he meant, and it brought a flush to her pale face. 'But I have confidence—a great confidence,' she said, very low, not looking at him. The Colonel took courage from these words.

'Your father, you know, Joyce,—that is very proud of you,

and to have such a daughter—and that would let no one vex you, not for a moment, my dear—not by a word or a thought—and that would like you to make a friend of him, and tell him—whatever you might like to tell him,’ he added, hastily breaking off in the middle of what he had meant to be a long speech, and giving double force to so much as he had said by these means.

Joyce had gradually aroused herself out of her dreams to understand the meaning in her father’s voice, which trembled and quickened, and then broke with a fulness of tender feeling which penetrated all the mists that were about her. There suddenly came to her a sense of help at hand—a belief in the being nearest to her in the world—a sort of viceroi of God more true than any pope—her father. What no one else could do he might do for her. It would be his place to do it; and it would be her right to appeal to him, to put her troubles into his hands. She had never realised this before: her father—who would let no one vex her, who would stand between her and harm, who would have a right to answer for her, and take upon himself her defence. The tears rushed to her eyes, and a sense of relief and lightening to her heart.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘I will mind that. I will never forget it: my father, that is like God, to know the meaning in my heart, even if I am far wrong: and not to be hard on me, but to see where I was deceived, and to take my cause in hand.’

‘Deceived!’ the Colonel faltered, with mingled consternation and wrath. ‘Show me the man that would deceive you, my dear child, and leave him to me—leave him to me.’

‘What man? There is no man,’ said Joyce, shaking her head. ‘Oh, if it was but that! but when it is me that has been the deceiver—and yet meant no harm!’

Her eyes swimming in tears that made them larger and softer than ever eyes were, the Colonel thought, turned to him with a tender look of trust which went to his heart, and yet was less comprehensible to him than all that had gone before. He was puzzled beyond expression, and touched, and exalted, and dismayed. He had gained that confidence which he had sought, and yet he knew less than ever what it meant. And she had said he was like God, which confused and troubled the good man, and was very different from the mission that had been given him to find out his child’s secret, and to bring to book—what horrible words were these!—to bring to book! But whatever Joyce had on her mind, at least it was not Norman Bellendean.

And here in the emotion of the moment, and the rising of other

and profounder emotions, the Colonel dropped his *consigne*, and gave up his investigations. He did not in the least understand what Joyce meant; but she had given him her confidence, and he was touched to the bottom of his tender heart. She had said that he would take her cause in hand, that he was her father like God—a new and curiously impressive view, turning all usual metaphors round about—that he would know her meaning, even if she were far wrong. Not a word of this did the Colonel comprehend—that is, the matter which called forth these expressions remained entirely dark to him; but it would have been profane, he felt, to ask for further enlightenment after she had thus thrown herself upon him for protection and help. He was glad to relieve the tension by having recourse to common subjects, so that without any further strain upon her, his delightful, tender, incomprehensible child might get rid of the tears in her eyes, and calm down.

The result was that the Colonel talked more than usual on that morning walk, and told Joyce more stories than usual of his old Indian comrades, and of things that had passed in his youth, going back thirty, forty years with at first a kind conscious effort to set her at her ease again, but after a while with his usual enjoyment in the lively recollection of these bright days which the old soldier loved to recall. And Joyce walked by his side in an atmosphere of her own, full of the bewitchment of a new enchanting presence suddenly revealed to her, full of the mystic, half-veiled consciousness of Love—love that was real love, the love of the poets, not anything she had ever known before. Her father's voice seemed to keep the shadow away, the thought of the wrong she had done and the troth she had broken, but did not interfere with that new revelation, the light and joy with which the world was radiant, the inconceivable new thing which had looked at her out of Norman Bellendean's eyes. She walked along as if she had been buoyed up by air, her heart filled with a great elation which was indescribable, which was not caused by anything, which looked forward to nothing, which was more than happiness, a nameless, causeless delight.

If she had been in a condition to examine what Captain Bellendean had said, or in any way to question what Mrs. Hayward called his intentions, Joyce's feelings might have been very different. But of this she took no thought whatever, nor asked herself any question. What she did ask, with a triumphant yet trembling certainty, was whether this was not the *Vita Nuova* of which she had read? The answer came in the same breath with that question. She knew it was the *Vita Nuova*—the same which had made the streets of Florence an enchanted land such as never was

by sea or shore, and turned the woods of Arden into Paradise. The pride and glory and delight of having come into that company of lovers, and received her inheritance, softly turned her dreaming brain. She had never been so much herself—for all those references to other people and pervading circumstances which shape a young woman's dutiful existence had disappeared altogether from her consciousness—and yet she was not herself at all, but a dream. The accompaniment of her kind father's pleasant voice, running on with his old stories, gave her a delightful shelter and cover for the voiceless song which was going on in her own heart. She had put her cause into his hands, as she felt, though she was not clear how it had been done. He would not blame her, though she was wrong. He would defend her.* And thus Joyce escaped from life with all its burdens and penalties, and floated away upon the soft delicious air into the *Vita Nuova*. Never was such a walk—her feet did not touch the ground, her consciousness was not touched by any vulgar sound or sight. Soft monosyllables of assent dropped from her dreaming lips as the delighted historian by her side went on with the records of his youth. He felt that he had all her interest—he felt how sweet it was to have a dear child, a girl such as he had always wished for, who had given him her full confidence, and who cared for everything that ever had happened to him, and was absorbed in it as if the story had been her own. In all their goings and comings together, there had never been a walk like this.

CHAPTER XXXI

‘WELL?’ said Mrs. Hayward, somewhat sharply, as she followed her husband upstairs.

‘Well, my dear! everything is quite right and sweet and true about her, as I always thought it was.’

‘I daresay. That is all very charming, Henry, and I am delighted that you are so much pleased. But what about Captain Bellendean?’

‘Oh!—about Captain Bellendean,’ said the Colonel, rubbing his hands with an attempt to look quite at his ease and comfortable. Then he added still cheerfully, but with a sinking of his heart, ‘Do you know, I don’t think there was anything quite definitely said between us about Norman Bellendean.’

‘Oh, there was nothing definitely said!’

‘Not by name, you know,’ said Colonel Hayward, with a propitiatory smile, still softly rubbing his hands.

‘And what did you talk of definitely, may I ask? You’ve been a long time out. I suppose something came of it,’ said Mrs. Hayward more sharply than ever.

‘Oh yes, certainly,’ said the Colonel, very conciliatory. ‘Joyce desired nothing better than to give me her full confidence, Elizabeth. She has a heart of gold, my dear. She said at once that she knew, I would never misunderstand her—that I would always help her; and nothing could be more true. I think I may say we understand each other perfectly now.’

Elizabeth’s keen eye saw through all this confidence and plausible certainty. ‘What did she tell you then—about last night?’ she said.

‘About last night? Well, my dear, I told you we did not go into things very definitely—we did not put all the dots on the i’s. It was rather what you might call—general. No names, you know,’ he repeated, looking at her with a still more ingratiating smile.

'No names, I know! In short, Henry, you are no wiser than when you went out,' Mrs. Hayward said, with an exasperation that was not unnatural. 'I knew how it would be,' she added. 'She has just thrown dust in your eyes, and made you believe whatever she pleased. I never expected anything else, for my part.'

'Indeed, my dear, you are quite mistaken. She said to me in the most trusting way that she had the fullest confidence—— My dear Elizabeth, I don't think you do justice to Joyce.'

'Oh, justice!' she cried: perhaps she did well to be angry. 'I must trust, then, to myself,' she said, 'as I generally have to do.'

'But Elizabeth——Elizabeth!'

'Oh, don't bother me, *please!*' the angry woman said.

Joyce went up stairs to take off her hat, and as she did so her eyes fell upon certain little closed cases upon her table. One of them was that photograph of old Janet Matheson in her big shawl and black satin bonnet, with Peter, a wide laugh of self-ridicule yet pleasure on his face, looking over her shoulder. It was from no scorn of those poor old people that the little case was closed. Mrs. Hayward's maid had made some silly remark about 'an old washerwoman,' and Joyce, almost with tears of anger, had shut it from all foolish eyes. She took it up and opened it now, and kissed it with quivering lips—wondering would granny understand her? or would she be so overjoyed, so uplifted, by the thought of the Captain, that everything else would be dim to her. Joyce put down the little homely picture, but in so doing touched another, which lay closed, too, beside it. She did not open that case—she recoiled with a low cry. The outside was enough—it filled her with a sudden repugnance, a kind of horror. She moved even from the side of the table where it was. She thought she saw him standing there looking at her, in the attitude in which he had stood for his portrait; and she remembered, nay, saw with a clearness beyond that of mere vision, his look as he had presented her with this memorial of himself. 'It is said to be very like,' he had said; 'I am no judge.' She remembered the ineffable little tone in which he had said it—a tone which even then filled her with something between ridicule and shame.

And now—oh, how could Joyce think of it! how could she look back upon that time! Now it was odious to her to recall him at all, to see him spring up and put himself into his attitude—so gentlemanly, as his mother said. Joyce grew crimson, a scorching flush came all over her. She shrank away from the

wretched little photograph as if it had been a serpent, and could sting her. She had never liked it. It had always seemed an uncomfortable revelation, fixing him there in black and white, much worse even than he was: *even*! Joyce hid her face in her hands, in an agony of self-horror and shame. Oh, how mean, dishonourable, vulgar, she was! He had been better than all the lads about, who would have thrust their awkward love upon her in the old days. An educated man, able to talk about poetry and beautiful things. She had been honoured by his regard—it had been a great thing for her to be engaged to such a man—and now! There was nothing, nothing which could excuse the baseness of her desertion of him. What could she say for herself? There was only one thing she could say, and that was what no one would understand. The one thing was, that she had not known what love was, and now love had come. Ah! if it had been love for some one poorer, less desirable than Andrew, her plea might have been believed. But love for Norman Bellendean—love that would put her in the place which was as good as a queen's to all the countryside—love by which she would better herself beyond conception.

Joyce felt a chill come to her heart after that hot rush of shame—how was she to say it, how accept it even in her own heart? Even granny would be ashamed—granny who had prophesied that he would be the first to be cast off—but without thinking that it would be Joyce—Joyce herself, not any proud father—who would cast off the poor schoolmaster. Joyce's honest peasant breeding, with its contempt for the *parvenu*, gave her a keener horror and shame than would have been possible, perhaps, to any other class. She felt humiliated to the very dust, angry with herself, disgusted at her own treachery. What should she do?—how represent it to those keen cottage critics, who would look at her behaviour with such sharp eyes? To give up Andrew Halliday for the Captain,—the meanest woman might do that—the one that was most ignoble. And who was to know, who was to understand, that it was true love, the first love she had ever known, and not pride or advantage that, before she knew it, had snatched Joyce's heart away?

She was not sufficiently composed to allow herself to think that she had never shown to her rustic suitor any more preference than was natural to the fact that he was more congenial to her than the ploughman. She had accepted sedately his attentions. She had consented vaguely to that half proprietorship which he had claimed in her; but there had been little wooing between them, and Joyce had put aside all those demonstrations of affection which Andrew had attempted. But she said to herself none of these things.

She even did not say that it was a mistake, for which in her youthfulness and ignorance she was scarcely to blame. She took it very seriously, as a sin which she had committed, but meaning no harm, meaning no harm, as she repeated to herself, with tears in her eyes. For the other had come upon her like a flood, like a fire, like some natural accident of which there was no warning. All had been tranquillity in her heart one moment—and in the next she knew that she was a traitor, forsworn. There had been no warning. She had not known of any danger—but in a moment she had discovered that she was a false woman, false and forsworn.

She went down to the luncheon-table after a long interval—long enough to make her late for that meal, which was a fault Mrs. Hayward did not approve. But Joyce had to bathe her hot eyes which could not shed any tears, but burnt in their sockets like fiery coals, she thought, and then to wait till the glaze and flush produced by the bathing had worn off. It had not altogether worn off when she came downstairs, but remained in a suspicious glow, so that she seemed to have been crying, though she had not been able to afford herself that relief. The Colonel cried, 'Why, Joyce!' when she appeared, and was about to make some further remark, when a look from his wife checked him. This looked like mercy on Mrs. Hayward's part, but perhaps it was only in order to inflict a more telling blow.

For, after some time when all was quiet, and Joyce, taking refuge in the tranquillity, had begun to breathe more freely, Mrs. Hayward all at once introduced a subject of which as yet there had been no discussion. 'By the way,' she said, suddenly and lightly, 'where are we going this autumn? It is nearly August, and we have not yet settled that.'

The Colonel answered, that for his part he was always very well disposed to stay at home; and that he thought, as there had been a great deal of excitement that year——

'No, I don't feel disposed to give up my holiday,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'Where shall we go? I know what you mean, Henry. You mean to beguile us into staying quietly here, and then when the Twelfth comes you will find some irresistible business that calls you away—to Scotland or somewhere. And you do not care what we are to do in the meantime, Joyce and me.'

The Colonel protested very warmly that this was not what he meant. 'Indeed it is very seldom I get an invitation for the Twelfth, not once in half a dozen years; and as for leaving you behind——'

'We will not be left behind,' said Mrs. Hayward, with that

alarming gaiety. 'No. I'll tell you what we will do to suit all parties. You shall go to Scotland for the Twelfth, and Joyce and I will do what I know her heart is set upon. We will go to see her old people in her old home. That will please you, Joyce, I know?'

This terrible suggestion was to Joyce as if a gun had suddenly been fired at her ear. She was entirely unprepared for anything of the kind, and she started so that the very table shook.

'To go to—my old home?'

'Yes, my dear. It would give the old people a great pleasure. We promised, you know, to bring you back.'

It was a cruel experiment to try. Joyce flushed and paled again with an agitation beyond control. 'It is very kind,' she faltered, 'to think of—but they would not look for me now.'

'Why not now? They don't go away on a round of visits in autumn, I presume.'

'My dear!' said the Colonel, in a shocked admonitory voice.

'Well, Henry! I mean no harm; but one time is the same as another to them, I should suppose. And we all know how fond they are of Joyce, and she of them. What more natural than that she should go to see them when the chance occurs?'

It was natural. There was nothing to reply. If all was true that Joyce had professed of love and reverence for these old people, what could be thought of her refusal, her reluctance to go and see them? She sat there like a frightened wild creature driven into a corner, and not knowing how to escape, or what to do, looking at them with scared eyes.

'My dear,' said Colonel Hayward, 'that all looks reasonable enough, and if Joyce wished it—but she must know best when it would be convenient to them. It might not be convenient at this time of the year, for anything we know.'

'It would be harvest,' said Joyce, thankful for the suggestion; 'they would be busy, busy: another time it would be better. Oh,' she cried suddenly, in an outburst of despair, 'how can I go home?'

'Joyce!'

'Oh, I'm unnatural! I'm not fit to live! How am I to go home!' cried the girl, who, less than three months ago, had left old Peter and Janet with, as she thought, a breaking heart. The two calm people at either end of the table put down their knives and forks to look at her—the Colonel with great sympathy, yet a certain pleasure; Mrs. Hayward with suppressed scorn.

'It is not so very long since you were sighing for it, Joyce,'

she said ; ' but a girl at your age may be allowed to change her mind.'

' And, my dear,' said her father, ' I am very joyful to think that your own real home is more to you than any other ; for that's how it ought to be.'

Joyce looked at them both with the troubled, dumb stare of helpless panic and stupefied cruel terror which comes to a wild thing in a snare. Her cry had been uttered and was over. She had no more to say ; but she had not sufficient command of herself to perceive that she should not have uttered that cry, or should seek to put some gloss upon it, now that it was beyond recall.

' And now you see that Joyce does not wish it, my dear,' said Colonel Hayward, ' of course you will never press that. It was only because we thought it would please you, Joyce ; but you may be sure she is right, Elizabeth. It would be too soon—too soon.'

' Oh, that's all right, if she thinks so,' said Mrs. Hayward. ' Of course I don't mean to press it. I thought it would delight Joyce ; but it appears I have made a mistake. Let us think of something else, Henry. Let us go abroad.'

' You would like that, my dear child ?' her father said. He was greatly touched by this clinging to himself, as he thought it—this preference of her new home to the old. To him there was neither variableness, nor the desertion of old ties, nor anything in it which impaired the character of his child, but only a preference for himself, a desire to be with him and near him, her father, upon whom she had made so tender a claim,—who, she had said, would be like God. Naturally she would rather be with him than with any one. He put out his hand and stroked hers caressingly. ' You would like that ? It would be a complete change. We might go to Switzerland, or even to the Italian lakes. You are very fond of Como, Elizabeth. Come now, say you would like that.'

Their eyes were upon her, and how were they to know the tempest of feeling that was in Joyce's mind ? She seemed to see the two old figures rise reproachful, their faces looking at her across the table—oh, so deeply wounded, with long looks of inquiry. Was it possible that already—already her heart had turned from them ? And Janet's words came surging back in the tempest of Joyce's thoughts, how she would mean no harm, yet be parted from them, and find out all the differences. So soon, so soon ! Janet's eyes seemed to look at her with deep and grieved reproach ; but, on the other hand, who were these two

who shut out Janet's face from her? Andrew in the attitude of the photograph, complacent, self-assertive, and Norman Bellen-dean, stooping, looking down upon her. Oh no, no, no! not home where these two were—not home, not home!

'I must say I am surprised, Joyce. Still, if that is what you feel, it is not for me to press the visit upon you. And so far as I am concerned, I like home much the best. I am not very fond of Scotland. It's cold, and I hate cold. Of course Joyce would like Como—every girl would like it—so long,' said Mrs. Hayward, with meaning, 'as there was not absolutely any other place which they liked best.'

This arrow fell harmlessly upon Joyce, who had fallen into such a storm of troubled thoughts that missiles from without failed to affect her. Of all places in the world there was but one only which was impossible to her, the beloved home where the man whom she loved was in the high place, and the man who loved her was in the lowly. These two antagonistic figures blurred out the two others—the old pair to whom she owed everything, to whom her heart went out with an aching and longing even while she thus abandoned them; and dear Bellen-dean, of which she thought with such horror and panic, the place she loved best in the world,—the only place in the world to which she dared not, must not go.

'There is no engagement,' said Mrs. Hayward to her husband when Joyce had escaped to her room.

'No engagement?' he repeated, with a surprised question.

'There has been no explanation. He has said nothing to her. And I think, after dangling after her for nearly three months, that he is not treating her well. If he comes back, Henry, I have told you what is your duty. You must ask him what his intentions are.'

'I would rather shoot him, or myself. You don't know what you are saying, Elizabeth,' the Colonel cried.

'Shooting him, or yourself, would not advance matters at all,' his wife said.

CHAPTER XXXII

ANDREW HALLIDAY had not spent a pleasant summer, and the winter closed in upon him with still less consolation. His love, his ambition, and all his hopes were centred in Joyce, and his mind was greatly distracted from those occupations which hitherto had filled his life. He no longer took the satisfaction he once had done in perfecting the school at Comely Green, in pushing on his show pupils, and straining every nerve for the approbation of the inspectors, and to acquire the reputation of the best school in the district. All his pleasure in the nice schoolhouse, which he had once inspected with such bright hopes, thinking what a home Joyce would make of it, what a place it would be, superior to all other schoolhouses, under her hands, which embellished everything—was gone. And even his Shakespeare class, and all the intellectual enthusiasms in which he had been stimulated by her, and which were the pride of his life and buoyed him up, with that sense of culture and superiority which is one of the most ineffable and delightful of human sensations, failed to support him now. For that beatific condition requires calm, and Andrew was no longer calm. He kept looking night and day for a summons into higher spheres. He dreamed of headmasterships in the 'South' which would be opened to him; of noble English schools where every boy was a little lord, and for which his own intellectual gifts, apart from any vain paraphernalia of university degrees, would, backed by Colonel Hayward's influence, make him eligible. It may seem strange that a man of any education should have believed in anything so preposterous; but Halliday was very ignorant of the world, though he was entirely unaware of that fact, and had no experience out of his own narrow circle. Little as this is recognised, it is nevertheless true that a clever man in his position is capable of misunderstandings and mistakes which would be impossible to a dolt in a higher sphere. He did not

know that he had as little chance of becoming a headmaster in a great school, by dint even of the greatest of natural gifts, as of becoming Prime Minister—far less, indeed, for political genius might force a way in the one direction, while the most exalted intellectualism would do nothing in the other. Andrew, bewitched by hope and aspiration, and the novel and intoxicating sense of having ‘friends’ in high places, whose greatest object in life must be his advancement, believed and hoped everything which the wildest fancy could conceive.

This made his life much less satisfactory to him in the general, and reduced the efficiency of the parish school of Comely Green, the success of which was less to him than it had ever been, and its routine less interesting. As for the house, and even the new furniture he had bought, he looked at them with scorn, almost with disgust. What was the little parlour, which was all that a set of prejudiced heritors allowed to the schoolmaster, in comparison with the lovely old-fashioned mansions which he had seen described in books, and which were full of every luxury which a headmaster could desire? This hope, which at first was almost a certainty, of better things, made life as it was very distasteful to Andrew. For the first three months there was scarcely a day when he did not expect to hear something. When he went out he thought it possible that a letter, or better, a telegram, might be waiting for him when he came back—and never stranger approached the school, that his heart did not beat expectant of the messenger who should bring him news of his promotion. When the inspector came for his annual examination, Andrew thought that there was something particular about all that he said and looked, and that this official was testing him and his success, to see how he would do for the higher sphere which was opening to receive him. The inspector happened to have letters to post as he passed through the village, one with the mystic H.M.S. printed upon it, and the unfortunate schoolmaster felt his heart beat, believing that it contained his character, his certificate, the description of himself, which would justify Government in translating him to a higher and a better sphere; and in this suppressed excitement and expectation he passed his life.

However, when the summer had given place to autumn a curious thing occurred to Andrew. Joyce’s letters, which had been short but very regular, and exceedingly nicely written, and so expressed as to trouble his mind with no doubts—for, indeed, Andrew was scarcely capable of doubting the faith of a girl who had the privilege of being chosen for his mate—suddenly stopped.

They had come weekly—an arrangement with which he was satisfied—and it was not until for the second time the usual day came and brought him no letter that he began to think her silence strange. When he heard from Janet, whom he visited regularly, with great honesty and faithfulness to his promise—though, as a matter of fact, he was not anxious to be seen to be on terms of intimacy with such very lowly people—that Joyce had gone abroad with her father, this seemed a not inadequate excuse for her. Andrew's heart swelled with the thought that to him, too, the possibility might soon come of going abroad for his holidays—a dignity and splendour which in anticipation raised him to a kind of ecstasy.

And for a time this satisfied him fully. But time went on, and Joyce, he knew, returned, and yet no communication came. He could not think why this should be, especially as Janet went on receiving letters, of which she would read extracts with a scarcely suppressed sense of superiority which was very galling to the schoolmaster. 'Ou ay, Andrew; come ben and tak' a seat; there's been a letter. She never lets an eight days pass without one—she's just as regular as the clock,' Janet would say, not unwilling to inflict that little humiliation; and then she would read to him a little bit here and there. If it had not been for that still lively hope, Andrew would have been seriously angry and anxious: and even when another month had stolen away, he was, though greatly surprised, yet still willing to believe that she was putting off in order to give him a delightful surprise at last,—in order to be able to tell him of some wonderful appointment which she was in the meantime straining every energy to obtain. But there was no doubt that this constant suspense did undermine his tranquillity. At the last, his temper began to suffer; he began to grow jealous and irritable. When the Captain came back to Bellendean and went to see Janet, and talked to her for hours about her child—as the old woman reported with as much pride as her dignity permitted—Andrew took heart again for the moment, expecting nothing less than that a similar visit should be paid to him, who certainly, he thought, was much more in the Captain's way—far more able to hold a conversation with him on topics either public or individual than an old ploughman and his wife. But the Captain never came; and there was no letter, no message, nothing but silence, and a darkness in which not only the headmastership but Joyce—who, to do him justice, was more to him than any promotion—seemed to be vanishing away.

This blank was made all the greater from the fact that Janet

in the meantime never failed to get her letter. Joyce wrote long tender letters to her beloved granny, telling her everything—and nothing; a fact which the keen-witted old woman had long ago discovered, but which naturally she kept to herself, not even confiding to Peter—whose chief amusement it was to hear these letters read over and over—the deficiency which she felt. Joyce described all her travels with a fulness which was delightful to the old people. ‘Ye can read me yon bit again about the bells and the auld man in the kirk,’ Peter would say; or, ‘Yon about the muckle hills and the glaciers—as daftlike a name as ever I heard; for there’s no’ mony glaziers, I’m thinking, yonder away—na, nor plumbers either.’ Janet fumbled for her spectacles, and got the letter out of a work-box which had been a present from Joyce, and prepared to read with every appearance of enthusiasm; but she said to herself, ‘She can tell me about glaciers and snawy hills, but no’ a word about hersel.’ It is doubtful, however, whether Andrew would have perceived this want any more than Peter. He would have been satisfied with letters about the glaciers and all the wonders she was seeing; but to have that information only at second-hand was hard upon him, and it was hard to be left out. Even if this silence should be caused by her desire to give him a delightful surprise—even if she were indeed waiting from week to week always expecting to have that piece of news to tell him—even in that case it was very hard to bear.

He came to the cottage one evening when the early winter had set in. The days had grown short and the nights long. The house of Bellendean stood out with a half-naked distinctness among the bare trees, and every path was thick with fallen leaves. Through the village street the wind was careering as though pursuing some one, and breathing with a long sigh that told of coming rain among the houses. A dreary night, with little light and little comfort in it—not a night to come out for pleasure. Andrew Halliday had brought a lantern to light him on various parts of his long walk, and he went in with a gloomy countenance like the night. The scene was a very homely one: the occupants of the cottage were poor, with none of the interest that attaches to beauty or youth, and yet there was much that was touching in the little interior. The supper was over, the things were all put away; it was nearly time for bed, for they rose early, and were tired with the work of the day. The Bible was on the table for the ‘worship,’ which was their last waking act. But in the meantime Peter sat in his old arm-chair beside the fire smoking his last pipe, his rugged countenance lit up by its proud smile, and a little

moisture in his eyes. The laugh with which he sometimes interrupted the reading had the far-off sound of a sob in it. Janet sat on the other side of the fire holding up the page she was reading to the light. It was Joyce's last letter. No book in the world had so much charm for them. It provided their literature for the week, and Peter had nearly got the current letter by heart before the next came. Out at his work among the dark wintry furrows, he would sometimes burst forth into an explosion of that tremulous laughter, repeating over one of the 'bits' in Joyce's letter, saying to himself, 'It's just extraordinar!' Whaur did she get a' thae remarks, that never would have come into my head, and me her grandfaither?' Of this admiration and emotion and tender love the air of the little room was full.

'Is that you, Andrew? Dear, man, I hope naething's the matter—you have an awfu' troubled countenance,' Janet said.

'There is nothing particular the matter,' said Andrew grimly, 'but I'm tired of waiting for what never comes, and I'm thinking of going up to London. I thought it best to let you know, in case you might have any message. Though, as you're always in correspondence——'

'Ou ay, we're always in correspondence,' said Janet.

'Just read ower that bit again, Janet, my woman,' said her husband. 'It's real diverting,—just like having a book to read that's a' your ain. Whaur she gets it a' is mair than I can tell.'

'No, thank you—I've no time,' said Andrew, 'and most likely it would not divert me; for, to tell the truth, I'm very serious, and things have come to that pass that I must just come to a settlement one way or other. So if you have any parcel or any message——'

'But you're no' going to throw up the school, or do anything rash? Do nothing rash, Andrew—that would be the warst of a'.'

'I hope I'm not an unknown person,' said the schoolmaster; 'if I throw up one I'll get another, for there's plenty that knows my value. But I have no intention to be rash. There's three days' vacation for the preachings, and I am going then.'

'For the preachings! Dear, lad, would you be away at the preachings?' Janet cried.

'Preachings or no preachings, I'm going to London,' he said, with impatience. 'I'll hear what she has to say; but I'm not a man to be just kept hanging on. She'll have to take me or to want me.' He was much impressed with the tremendous character of the choice that Joyce would have to make. It sobered his tone. 'I hope nobody will think that I would be hard upon her:

but she must satisfy me that all's well, or else——' He did not finish the sentence; but the sternness of the determination which he would not utter was visible in his eyes.

'I wouldna speak to her in a tone like that, if I was ^{*}you. Ye may lead Joyce with love and kindness many a mile, but ye'll no' drive her an inch—no' an inch. Though she's our ain, she has her faults, like every ither mortal creature. If ye wag your finger at her in the way of a threat——'

'He'll no' do that,' said Peter, in a tone of quiet decision, looking the schoolmaster all over. Andrew was a much younger man, but the arm of the gigantic old labourer could still have laid him low. Andrew, however, was irritable and sore, and he looked up with by no means a conciliatory demeanour.

'I'll do what's becoming,' he said. 'I'll not be dictated to. A man has a right to know what a woman means that has accepted him for her husband. Either she'll fulfil her contract or—we'll have to come to other terms.'

'Oh!' cried Janet, unable to refrain from that little triumph. 'Did I no' tell ye that? Ye were fain to make friends with yon grand gentleman, and leave Peter and me on the ither side, but I telt ye ye would be the first to feel it—and so it's turned out.'

'That remains to be seen,' said Andrew, buttoning his overcoat. 'It's a very dark night, and without a light I could scarcely have kept the road—though I should know it well enough,' he added, with a little bitterness. 'I was not called upon to take all this trouble to come over and see you. But I would not go without letting you know. I was not asking your opinion. The thing is, if you have any message or parcel—I could take a parcel.'

'I'm sure I canna tell what I could send her, unless it was some fresh eggs, or a bunch of the monthly roses off the wa'. She'll have everything that heart can desire—and the eggs would be a trouble to ye. And nae doot she has far better flowers than a wheen late roses off a cottage wa'.'

Peter had got up while Janet was speaking, and opened his large knife. 'Len' me your lantern, Andrew,' he said, and went out with heavy slow steps to the little garden, or 'yaird' as they called it. He came in, a minute after, with a branch from the old China rose, which half covered that side of the house. The old man, with his heavy figure and rugged countenance, the lantern in one hand and the cluster of pale roses in the other, might have made a symbolical picture. He set down the lantern and began to trim off the thorns from the long bough with its nodding flowers.

There could not have been a more wintry posy. The leaves were curled up and brown with frost ; the hips, only half coloured, pale as the flowers, hung in clusters, glistening with cold November dews ; and the faint roses gave a sort of plaintive cheer and melancholy prettiness, like the faces of children subdued into unnatural quiet. 'Ye'll take her this from her auld folk,' Peter said.

'Eh, but it'll be hard to carry a lang brainch like that : tak' just the flowers, Andrew ; ye can pit them in your hat.'

'I'll take it as it is,' said Andrew. He was not below the level of that tender feeling ; and though there was a great deal of angry disappointment, there was love also in his heart. He took the branch of roses and unripe hips, and frost-bitten leaves, and disappeared into the darkness with it, with a curt 'good-night.' The old couple stood by the fire, listening to his steps as he went quickly out of hearing ; then shut the door for the night, and opened the Book, and said their prayers for Joyce,—'her that Thou gavest us, and that Thou hast taken from us, we darena doubt for her good ; and oh, that a' the blessings o' the covenant may rest upon her bonnie heid !' It was the petition of every night, and Janet gave the response of nature (though responses, it need not be said,* were profoundly contrary to all her principles) in a whispered repetition of the words, and a faint little sob.

Andrew walked the three miles with his lantern in one hand and his long branch of roses in the other, a strange apparition to have met upon the road in the darkness of the November night. And next evening he set out, after having completed all his school work, by the night train, with a great determination in his heart, and yet many softened and wistful thoughts. He was going to 'put it to the touch, to gain or lose it all,'—repeating to himself over and over Montrose's noble verse. He was going to decide his fate : if there was no hope of that headmastership ; if, perhaps, competition and vile interest and patronage—always vile when they are opposed to one's self—had rendered all efforts impossible : to bid them strive no more, since he was content to wait for the reward of a conscious merit which did not, after all, want any foreign aid to gain eventually all that was meet ; and in the meantime to secure his love, to insist upon it that no circumstances should separate him from Joyce. He went over and over in his imagination the interview he would have with her, fancying how she would excuse herself that she had waited for good news, and answering, with a little burst of natural eloquence, 'Do you think I would not rather have a kind word from your hand than all the

news in the world? Do you think a grand appointment would make up to me for losing sight of *you*?' A hundred speeches like this floated through his mind, and were said over by his lips in the little preliminary journey to Edinburgh in the chill afternoon. The thought of going to London was in itself a great excitement too.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HALLIDAY was both gloomy and angry when he left home, full of that sense of unappreciated merit which cuts with peculiar keenness into the minds of those who entertain no doubt as to their own superiority over the ordinary level; but the influence of external things and the distraction of travel soon succeeded in clearing to a great degree his mental firmament. The bustle of the great station at Edinburgh, the care of selecting a comfortable corner for his journey, the hurrying and rush of less fortunate persons hampered by luggage and children, amused his mind and distracted his thoughts. He travelled, as a matter of course, in the third-class; and, equally as a matter of course, he regarded with a dignified derision the stalwart young men in deer-stalking coats, and with every superfluity imaginable in the way of wraps and sticks and dressing-cases, who indulged themselves in the luxury of sleeping-carriages. Sybarites he called them in his mind, with a half-contemptuous, half-indulgent smile—frivolous creatures, altogether unaware that in a corner of a third-class carriage a man so much their superior in everything was calmly regarding them, making the inevitable comparison between folly and its comfortable cushions, and wisdom, which, if it did not trudge afoot, yet used only such conveniences as dignified necessity required. The deer-stalking young men, who never thought of the matter, would indeed have been highly surprised had they known how they were set down at their proper value by their travelling companion. The comparison did Andrew good: it made him feel his own dignity, his superiority to the external, yet made his breast swell with a pathetic wonder. Was it perhaps possible that Joyce, after three months' experience of luxury, should prefer these brainless ones, so much lower in the intellectual scale? Surely, surely that could not be possible. He saw with a smile that they took copies of the *Field* and the *Sporting News* into their luxurious carriages with

them. He himself had the *Saturday Review*. There is nothing so sustaining as this sense of being better than one's neighbours. It comforted poor Andrew, and kept him warm during his journey. The gentlemen in the sleeping-carriages might rest better, but they did not, nay could not, feel half the moral elevation of the school-master in his corner of the third-class.

London, too, veiled in a grey-and-yellow fog, through which the lamps, not yet extinguished, and a line of dusky sunrise among the clouds, looked red, brought an excitement to his mind which few perhaps of the companions of his journey shared. Andrew greeted the great city as people greet it in books,—as adventurers in the days of Dr. Johnson saluted that centre of the world. He thought with a tingle of strange emotion in his breast that the great roar of humanity might become familiar to his ears ere long. He rose to the sound and commotion with a sense of predestined greatness. The people in the sleeping-carriages tumbled out drowsily, rubbing their eyes in the midst of a dream. But Andrew stepped forth inspired by the recollection of many a great man who had arrived like himself, not knowing what might befall him. His hopes, his courage rose more and more as he felt where he was—in a great place where he was sure to be understood, and where the human mind was in a perpetual progress, not stagnant as in the country. He felt, indeed, not as he had done when he left home, as if his mission were a forlorn hope, but rather as if he were coming like a conqueror to see and to vanquish. It wanted only, he said to himself, that touch of reality to chase all the chimeras away. He would, he must, find Joyce faithful as ever, keeping silence only because her plans were not yet ripened for his advancement. He would find her father full of that respect which the man of action feels for the man of mind. He would be received as an honoured guest; he would be admitted into their confidence, and made acquainted with their hopes. Visions of a noble old house in some sort of cloistered dignified centre of learning rose again before his eyes—A. Halliday, Headmaster. He did not definitely fix upon Eton or Harrow, having no actual knowledge of either of those places; but something exhilarating, sweet, a strong yet soft delusion, stole into his being. He was so entirely inexperienced and full of the ignorance of his class (although a man so well instructed), that he was not aware of any restriction upon such appointments that could not be got over by sufficiently powerful influence. Influence could do everything, Halliday thought.

He got a bath and breakfast at the nearest hotel, undiscouraged even by its grim and chill nakedness, and feeling a wonderful free-

dom and elation in the consciousness of thus doing what the best people did, and being waited upon, served by a man-servant (if you liked to put it in that way) like the best. It cost a good deal, but it was worth the expenditure. The fog cleared off as the morning advanced, and it was in the sunshine of a bright hazy morning that he set off on the final stage of his journey. He had dressed himself with the utmost care and all the resources of his wardrobe. His tie was blue, his coat a frock-coat of extreme solemnity, which he usually wore at funerals. He thought, as he was a traveller, that it was the right thing to wear with this a round hat such as he wore in the country. He had a pair of lavender gloves, his umbrella was very neatly rolled up—in short, at half a mile off you recognised his unquestionable character and doubtful gentility with as much ease as if he had written Andrew Halliday, school-master at Comely Green, upon his manly breast; but he had not the least idea of that. His clear and ruddy complexion was a little paled by the night's journey, and by the mixture of agitation and excitement which he could not but feel as the moment of meeting approached. He looked a most respectable young man, very respectable, honest as the day. You would scarcely have suspected, however, to see him, how superior he felt to the people in the sleeping-carriages, and how, when they got the *Field* and the *Sporting Times* at the bookstalls, he had bought the *Saturday Review*.

He went by the railway from Waterloo, admiring the river which ran glistening grey, like a great worm, under the shining of the wintry sun—and got out with a great heartbeat at the station. How near he was now! He felt inclined to take a walk, to see the place and look at the view, pushing off the decision for a time, the certainty—for he had so little doubt by this time that it was a certainty—of the happy meeting. To see Joyce in perhaps a few minutes; to hear her cry of astonishment and delight; to have her come up to him in her shy way, never demonstrative, unless perhaps the long separation might have made her more so. 'Oh, Andrew! and I was just going to write to tell you——' He would not wait till she said 'about the headmastership.' He would take her in his arms, whoever was there (for had he not the right?), and say, 'About yourself, my dearest—that's what I want to hear about.' He thought he would take a walk first to savour a little this delightful scene, and think how she would look and what he would say. It was so near, so very near! He would keep it at arm's-length a little in order to enjoy it the more.

It sobered him, however, to hear that Colonel Hayward's house

was some distance off, and to receive confused instructions which he could not follow. As a matter of fact, the instructions were not at all confused, they were only too rapid and clear. 'First turning to the right, second turning to the left; then go straight on till you pass the church; then first turning, second turning.' How could he keep all that in his mind? It was he that was confused, not the direction. If they had said, turn to the west and then a little to the north—— He stumbled along, forgetting whether it was the first, second, or third turning he ought to take, till he came to a church, which was not the church to which he had been directed; and from thence he stumbled on again by a great many roads clothed with pretty houses, which bewildered him. He stopped finally to ask his way of a brisk little lady, who cried, 'Oh, Colonel Hayward's!' her eyes dancing with instant interest, and a look full of interrogations, as if she would have liked to ask him a hundred things. Andrew could scarcely restrain himself from asking, 'Do you know Joyce?' He felt at once that this eager little lady jumped at some conclusion about himself, and was eager to ask who he was—perhaps whether he was the lover of whom Joyce must have spoken to everybody with whom she was intimate. And Andrew's instinct was indeed not far wrong: for Mrs. Sitwell immediately divined him to be somebody out of the mysterious past life of which none of the Haywards spoke, and wondered whether, perhaps, he was some one with whom Joyce had got entangled' in these dark ages. She stood and looked after him when she had given him his instructions, with curious eyes, noting his long frock-coat and his low hat. How dreadful! she said to herself, and could scarcely contain the curiosity that filled her. Should she make a hurried round through the district, and then approach the Haywards' on the other side, so as to catch him there, and see with her own eyes the position of affairs? Mrs. Sitwell knew that Joyce would be just going in with her father from their morning walk, and would be caught by the visitor, and would be unable to escape.

Certainly she must know Joyce: she must divine who he was: Andrew said this to himself, and was further exhilarated and strengthened by the idea. Of course, Joyce must have told her friends. He went on with better success this time, inspired by the little active lady with those eager eyes, who must know—and at last got to the very door. His heart was beating now very quickly indeed. Joyce's door—so different from the cottage where he used to find her. There she had always been shy, keeping behind old Janet, never willing to permit any demonstration.

Would things be different now? Would she rush to him after his long separation, laying her head upon his shoulder? This image filled Andrew's face with light and colour as he knocked at her father's door.

'Is Miss Hayward at home?' The appearance of Baker gave him a distinct sensation of pleasure. Colonel Hayward's butler or upper servant, a domestic of a high class. Andrew would have liked to see a footman or two behind, but pleased himself with the thought that this must be considered higher *ton*. 'Is Miss Hayward at home?'

'Miss Hayward? well, I can't say. She's been out walking with the Colonel, and whether they've come back or not, I can't tell you. Mrs. Hayward is in,' Baker said. He was not impressed by the appearance of the visitor. He thought it must be some man from a shop, or a person about a subscription, at the best.

'It is not Mistress Hayward but Miss Hayward I want.'

'Very well,' said Baker—'I hear you. If you'll wait a bit, I'll go and see.'

And Andrew had to wait, sadly against his will, outside the door. 'You'll excuse me, but Missis's charges are as the door is always to be shut,' Baker said, with a restrained chuckle, instinctively delighted to do his duty in a way that was offensive to the newcomer, whom he saw to be of inferior condition, and likely to be an undesirable guest. Andrew's sensations when he was left outside his love's door were not pleasant. He ceased to think of the butler as a high-class domestic, and called him in his mind a pampered menial, but consoled himself with the thought of the downfall that would happen to Baker when he knew who it was whom he had shut out. It was, however, a disagreeable moment of suspense. He tried to distract his mind by an examination of the great flower-vases at the door, the shrubs in their winter green, the perfectly swept and close-cut turf, all the careful surroundings of the place, not imposing or vast, but so exquisitely kept,—more perfect even than Bellendean. To think that he should have time to investigate all this, while she sat within with a beating heart, divining—would she divine?—his approach. When the butler described him, she would know, and come rushing out. She would rush to him, and the pampered menial would see—— At this moment the door opened quickly, and Baker said, 'Hi! Missis will be obliged if you'll send in your name.'

This unceremonious address startled Andrew. He said, 'My name?' arrested in the middle of his thoughts.

'I suppose you've got one,' Baker said.

Though this was so far from the reception he expected, he was not unprepared. He took his card-case out of his pocket, partially restored to himself by the pleasure of using it, which was a thing that did not occur often, and gave the pampered menial a card. He stepped briskly inside as he did so, resolved to bear no more of this, and followed the man as he returned to the drawing-room with the card in his hand. Andrew's heart beat very quickly now,—his tranquillity was considerably disturbed. The moment had come : another instant and Joyce would be in his arms, putting all pampered menials to scorn——

The door opened. There was a faint rustle of ladies' dresses, a glow of softened light, the sound of his own name, 'Mr. Andrew Alliday,' and then a cry. She did not rush into his arms. He came to himself after that interval of excitement, and saw Joyce standing, her hands clasped, her eyes with a look of horror in them, drawing back as if she would have fled, with her face turned towards the door. He put down his hat upon the nearest chair, and crying 'Joyce !' went forward with outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JOYCE had just come in from her morning walk. She was standing in the middle of the room with her hat, which she had just taken off, in her hand. And Mrs. Hayward had been making some remarks to her, such as mothers often, and step-mothers in some cases, feel it their duty to make. It was on the subject of the Sitwells, whom Mrs. Hayward regarded in their poverty (notwithstanding that the parsonage-house had been begun, and things were on the whole going well with them) with a certain contempt.

‘I think, indeed, you prefer such people to those of your own class.’

This was what Mrs. Hayward was saying when Baker, still more contemptuous of the inferior world than she, opened the door. ‘There is a person,’ he said, ‘asking for Miss Hayward.’

‘A person—one of your district people, no doubt. They come at all hours. There really must be a stop put to this, Joyce.’

‘Well, ma’am, it’s a male person, with a haccent,’ said Baker—‘not one from these parts.’

‘Miss Hayward can’t see every idler who chooses to ask for her: inquire his name,’ said the mistress of the house.

And no premonition crossed the mind of Joyce. She stood to receive the interrupted lecture, with her head a little bent, and her hat in her hand. She never made any stand for herself on such occasions, nor said a word in self-defence—probably afraid to trust her voice, and too proud to squabble. This made her, it need scarcely be said, very provoking to her step-mother, and aggravated any original offence in the most insufferable way. She stood quite silent now, waiting till she should be dismissed. And to tell the truth, Joyce, in the multitude of her thoughts, was very sick of everything about her, and of the friends for whom she was incurring reproof, and of the petty fault-finding which seemed to surround her steps wherever she went. Mrs. Hayward did not

resume her lecture. She sat down, slightly flushed and angry, expectant to see what new visitor might betray Joyce's inclination towards shabby persons. 'Mr. Andrew 'Alliday,' said Baker, reading from the card. And then Joyce uttered that cry—her hat fell out of her hand upon the floor. She started violently, gave a hurried glance round as if looking for some way of escape, then turned a pale and terrified countenance towards the door.

'Joyce!'

The man was quite respectable; his frock-coat made him look like a Dissenting minister, or perhaps a commercial traveller, or something of that kind. This was Mrs. Hayward's bewildered reflection. She sat and looked on as if it had been a scene in a play.

'Oh!' Joyce said, clasping her hands. Then with a great effort she held out one hesitatingly to the new-comer, and said, 'Andrew!' her voice dying away in her throat.

He seized her hand in both his. Though he loved Joyce, and his heart bounded at the sight of her, he was also anxious to impress the pampered menial with a sense of the hideous mistake he had made. 'My darling!' he cried.

Baker did hear, and grew purple with horror, and lingered about the door after he had reluctantly closed it, to hear more if possible. But Joyce retreated before the ardent advance of her lover. The light began to fail in her eyes. She put up her hands faintly to keep him back. 'Oh, Andrew! what has brought you here?' she cried.

'Who is this—person?' said Mrs. Hayward, rising from her chair.

Andrew turned round upon her with a smile. 'It is a long time since we have met,' he said. 'She is a little agitated. She was always very shy. Another man who did not understand might think this was a cold reception. But I know her better. You will be Mrs. Hayward, ma'am, without doubt?'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Hayward; but what have you to do with Joyce? and how do you dare to call Miss Hayward by her Christian name?' cried the lady of the house.

Andrew smiled again—he was prepared even for this emergency. 'My name,' he said, smiling with a complacency which diffused itself all over him, and shone even in the glister of his well-blackened boots, 'should be sufficient passport for me in this house. But perhaps you did not properly catch my name, for English servants clip the consonants in a surprising manner. Allow me——' He had taken out the card-case, that infallible mark of gentility, and

here handed her a card with an ease and grace to which he felt no objection could be made. Mrs. Hayward, confounded, read out aloud, 'Mr Andrew Halliday.' Underneath, in very small letters, was written, '*Schoolhouse, Comely Green.*'

'You will at once perceive, ma'am,' said Andrew, 'that if I ask to be left for a little alone with Joyce, I am asking no more than my right.'

'Alone with Joyce! You want—what do you want? ME to take myself out of your way! Oh, this is too much!' Mrs. Hayward cried.

'It is not too much, madam,' said Andrew, increasing in dignity, 'if you consider the circumstances. It is surely no more than any man in my position has a right to ask.'

'Joyce, who is this man? Joyce, do you hear that he wants to turn me out of my own drawing-room? For goodness' sake——! Oh, I must call Colonel Hayward.'

'That will be just in every sense the best way. The Cornel knows me, and he will at once understand,' said Andrew, with the blandest self-possession. He opened the door for Mrs. Hayward, which he knew was the right thing to do; and it was sweet to him to feel that he was acting as a gentleman should from every point of view.

'Joyce!' he cried—'my Joyce! now we are really alone, though perhaps only for a moment—one sweet look, my own dear!'

Joyce drew back from him, shrinking to the very wall. 'Don't,' she said, 'don't!' retreating from him. Then, with something of her old authority, 'Sit down there; sit down and tell me, has anything happened? What has brought you here?'

'Oh, is that what is wrong?' he said. 'I've frightened you, my dear one. No, no—no reason to be frightened. They are all well, and sent every message. Joyce, can you ask why I came? Because I could do without you no longer—because I was just longing for a look, for a kind word——'

'Sit down,' she said in peremptory tones, 'sit down!' She herself kept standing, leaning upon the glass door which led out to the verandah, her slender figure standing dark against the light. Her heart beat so, that there was a thrill and tremble all over her, visible against that background to which she clung. But it gave her a little relief when he obeyed her, and deposited himself upon a chair.

'I am very sorry to have alarmed you, my dear. I thought that when you heard my name, your first thought would be for

me. It was not too much to expect, was it, after being engaged—for more than a year?’

‘Andrew,’ she said, with a shiver—‘Andrew.’

‘What, my dearest? I know you’re very shy—very, very diffident—far more than you ought to be. If ever girl should have a little assurance, a little confidence, surely it would be you with me.’

He could not but be superior still—trying to reassure her, to give her a little boldness, smiling upon her in his most protecting, encouraging way.

‘Andrew,’ she said again. And then Joyce’s courage failed her altogether. She seized on any, the first expedient that occurred to her to postpone all personal questions. ‘You are sure they are well,’ she said tremulously. ‘Granny—and my grandfather—and all; and not missing me—not too much—not breaking their hearts——’

‘Breaking their hearts! But why should they, poor old bodies?—the feelings get blunted at that time of life. So long as they have their porridge and their broth, and plenty of good cakes—and a cup of tea. It is me you should ask that question. Do you know you have used me ill, Joyce? You have written oftener to them than to me—though it is me,’ Halliday said, ‘with whom you have to spend your life—I am not saying at Comely Green. No doubt you’ve got different notions in a house like this. It’s always difficult to go back, and I would not wish it—I would not ask it. But in some more refined, more cultivated place—in some position like what we read of—like what able men are securing every day——’ He rose as he spoke, inspired by this conviction, and approached her once more with outstretched arms.

Mrs. Hayward could not find her husband upstairs or down. He went to his library invariably after his walk, but he was not there to-day. He had not gone to his room upstairs. He was not among his flower-seeds in the closet, where he had at the present season a great deal to do, arranging and naming these treasures. At last she met him coming in, in his tranquil way, from the garden, a pot of flowers in his hands.

‘Look at these begonias, my dear. Now isn’t it worth while to take a little trouble when one gets a result like this? I am carrying it in for your own little table.’

‘It is a fine time to talk of begonias,’ she cried, pushing away the plant which he held out to her. ‘Henry, for goodness’ sake hurry into the drawing-room and put a stop to it at once! That man is there with Joyce.’

'That man!' cried the Colonel, astounded. 'What man? Bellendean?'

'Oh, how can you talk! What objections could there be to—— Henry, wake yourself up, for goodness' sake! It is the man—the man you would never tell me of—the schoolmaster—the Scotchman. Go, go! and put a stop to it. I have been hunting for you high and low. Who can tell what they are settling all by themselves? Henry, I tell you go and put a stop to it!'

The Colonel put down the pot upon the hall table. He was quite bewildered. 'The Scotchman?' he said; 'the—the—schoolmaster?—with Joyce? I suppose, my dear, it must be one of her old friends?'

'I suppose, my dear, it is the man you—never told me of,' cried Mrs. Hayward fiercely. 'The man she was to marry. Go, I tell you, and put a stop to it, Henry!'

'I put a stop to it!' he said. The Colonel grew red like a girl—he grew pale—he wrung his hands. 'Elizabeth, my dear, you know all about that better than I ever could do; you understand—such things? How could I—put a stop to it?' In his trouble he paced up and down the hall, and knocked against Baker, who was hanging about in the hope of hearing something, and ordered him off in a stentorian voice. 'What are you doing here, sir? Be off, sir, this moment!' cried the Colonel. Then he added, apologetic yet angry, 'These servants take a great deal upon them. You should teach them their proper place.'

'Henry,' cried Mrs. Hayward, 'it is not like you to save yourself behind the servants. You must come with me, at least. I insist upon it. What authority have I over her? If I must interfere, it can only be as representing you. They may have settled everything by this time,' she cried, and seized her husband's arm. It was not to support him, as he very well knew, but to drag him to the sacrifice.

Andrew had risen: he had gone towards his love, holding out his arms. His figure, not graceful in itself, with the long frock-coat coming down a little too low, and putting him out of drawing, showed against the light; while Joyce, trembling, pressed against the window, shrinking from his advance, seemed to stand on the defensive, with a pale and panic-stricken face. When the Colonel saw this scene, he no longer needed any stimulant. He dropped his wife's arm, and, stepping forward quickly, put his hand upon the intruder's shoulder. 'Hey, sir! don't you see the young lady is afraid of you?' he cried.

Andrew turned round at once with a quick recovery, and instantly extended his hand. He required not a moment to recover himself, being primed and ready for whatever might happen. 'How do you do, Cornel?' he said; 'I'm extremely glad to see you. I was telling Mrs. Hayward—as I presume that lady is, though Joyce, being so shy, did not introduce me—I was telling her that this happy meeting would be incomplete without a sight of you.'

'What do you want here, sir?' cried the Colonel. 'What have you to do with my daughter?' Then Colonel Hayward's natural courtesy checked him in spite of himself. 'I—I beg your pardon,' he said, after a moment. 'Perhaps I'm making a mistake—perhaps it's me you want, and not my daughter. Joyce, no need to be frightened, my love, when your father's here.'

Andrew had not given way an inch. He had no want of courage. He confronted the angry warrior without flinching. 'What do I want here, Cornel?' he said. 'I see you have forgotten me. I have just come to see *her*. It is natural I should want to see the young lady I am engaged to. You took her away in such a hurry, I had no time to make any arrangement. But nobody will doubt my right to come and see her, I suppose. Joyce, my dear one——'

'Be silent, sir!' the angry Colonel cried.

Andrew shrugged his shoulders. 'Silent or not, it makes little difference. Words between you and me, Cornel, will change nothing,' he said.

'Joyce,' cried the Colonel, with a gasp, 'what does this fellow mean? You are almost fainting with terror. Go away, and leave me to deal with this man.'

'She'll not do that,' said Andrew calmly.

'She'll not do that? She shall do what I wish, sir, I can tell you, and nobody shall interfere with her actions in her father's house.'

'She'll not do that, Cornel, for this good reason, that Joyce will never give up her word pledged and her promise given. If you think so, it is clear you know very little of Joyce, Colonel Hayward, though you are her father,' Halliday said.

He did not look at Joyce to intimidate her. He held up his commonplace head; and though he was of unimposing stature, and his frock-coat was too long, the schoolmaster looked every inch a man. His homely features grew dignified, his attitude fine. The Colonel stared at him, silent, not comprehending the transformation; while Joyce, roused too by this subtle change in the

air, stood upright apart from the window on which she had been leaning, and turned to her father with a steadiness which was given at once by the sudden stimulus and by the rising despair.

'Father,' she said, 'it is quite true. I—did not expect him—and it gave me a shock. I thought perhaps—he might be bringing ill news. It is true,' she said, after a pause; 'I am engaged—to Andrew Halliday. He has a right to come—for me——' Her voice stopped again. She stood quite still for a moment, then flinging herself suddenly on the Colonel's shoulder, 'Oh, father! FATHER!' she cried.

'What do you think of this, sir?' cried the Colonel, clasping her fast with one arm, holding out the other with an oratorical wave.

'I think just what she has said herself, that she is excited and overdone. I am very sorry I did not write and tell her I was coming. It would have saved her all this. But her nerves were not in this agitated state in the old days. I would like to know what you have been doing to my betrothed among you in England,' the schoolmaster said, 'to make her like this.'

Colonel Hayward was too angry, too much bewildered and agitated, to reply. He took Joyce to the sofa, and made her sit down. 'My dear child,' he said, 'you must not let yourself be intimidated—you mustn't give way. You may be sure you are quite safe. Nobody shall bully you or put forth a false claim upon you here.'

Mrs. Hayward had not said a word all this time, her husband having unexpectedly risen to the height of the occasion. Elizabeth knew how to hold her tongue. But she intervened now with calm authority. 'We've no right to say it is a false claim,' she said, 'till we know more about it; but you can see for yourself, Mr.—Mr. Halliday, that she is not in a state now to have it proved. Come back later; nothing can be done now. Come back in the evening, and my husband will see you finally.'

'Finally!' said Andrew. 'You will see me finally, ma'am, when I take away my wife—but not till then. After that, you may be sure I will have little temptation to show myself in this house.'

The schoolmaster was roused. All that was best in him—his real love, his true independence, his sense of manhood, all came to his aid. He knew his rights and his power, and that no father could crush a lover so determined. But though he said these words with genuine and indignant feeling, the utterance of them brought another side of the question back to his mind. If it came

to that—yes ; he was man enough to carry his love away, herself alone, as he had wooed her for herself alone. But nobody but he knew how many glorious visions, how many hopes, would be cut off if he shook the dust from off his feet and resolved to cross that threshold no more. He would not give up Joyce, but he as good as gave up the headmastership—that dream of glory. He saw it melt away in the air, the baseless fabric of a vision. He felt himself come down, with a giddy sense of descent and failure, and become once more Andrew Halliday, schoolmaster, Comely Green. He had even perhaps a little neglected Comely Green for the sake of that too sweet, too tempting illusion. And now he must resign all thought of it, all hope. The renunciation thrilled through all his nerves, as he stood there facing the prejudiced and foolish people who did not perceive what it was they were throwing away. But even this did not shake his faith in himself and his confidence in his rights. He cast a glance which was full of compassion yet disapproval at the group on the sofa. ‘I can see,’ he said, ‘that Joyce is too much agitated to be responsible, and that the Cornel is excited and unable to see the rights of the situation. Therefore, ma’am, I will take your advice. It is not the reception I had a right to expect ; but, nevertheless, I have full faith in Joyce when she comes to herself. I will withdraw till this evening. No ceremony, I beg,’ cried Andrew hurriedly. ‘I will find my way out—there’s no need for any one to open the door.’ Even in the midst of questions so much more serious, he remembered that it would be bitter indeed to show his discomfiture to the pampered menial who had admitted him. That at least he would not endure.

• Mrs. Hayward followed him out of the room, sparing him this indignity. Perhaps the sight of Joyce leaning upon her father, absorbing his every thought, was as little agreeable to her as to Andrew. If Joyce was in trouble, it was at least her own making, whereas the innocent people whom she dragged into it had done nothing to deserve it. Mrs. Hayward regarded Andrew with angry contempt, but she was not without a certain fellow-feeling for him as a sufferer from the same cause. His air of terrible respectability, his coat, his hat, his gloves, everything about him, were so many additions to the sins of Joyce. And yet she felt herself more or less, as against Joyce, on Andrew’s side. She stood behind him while he opened the door, grimly watching all his imperfections. The back-door, she said to herself, the servants’ hall, would have been his right place. And yet, if the man spoke the truth, he was quite a fit and proper match for Joyce !

CHAPTER XXXV

FROM August to November the time had gone very slowly and very hardly for Joyce.

After that glowing afternoon, when she had heard from Norman Bellendean words which she could never forget, not another sign or token from him had reached her. It is not an unprecedented thing that a gap like this should happen in the midst of a love-tale. A declaration interrupted, a question unanswered, may expose any pair of lovers to such a blank. The man may be kept back by many reasons; the woman on her side cannot gather up the broken threads. Joyce, above all, had no initiative to take. He had said he would come back, but he had not come back; and thus the story of her awakened heart had seemed to close, as it began, in agitation and shame. It had been wrong to listen to him, wrong to allow the thought of him to enter into her heart. She had not intended it, she said to herself, as is always said. The strong new tide which she did not understand, the character of which she had begun to suspect too late, had carried her away. What defence could she have put up against it when she never suspected it,—when it was to her a surprise most painful, though so intoxicating? Who is there guilty of such infidelity, forsaking an old love for a new, who cannot excuse herself in such words? And of many such it is true, as with Joyce, that the first love had been a mere name, a something not understood, an acquiescence—no more. If she had sinned against Andrew in accepting the love which was true enough on his side, without any real response, it had been done without guile, with no knowledge of any harm. Joyce had been conscious that it was not the love of which her beloved poets had sung; but how could she tell? As there was no second Shakespeare, so perhaps that love of the poets had died away into something calm and poor, like the dull prose of to-day; and when the dulness about her had burst asunder like a husk,

and flowers had come forth, and a blossoming and brightness indescribable, the girl, bewildered, had tried to attribute that illumination to other causes, to give it other names.

The revelation, when it came, lasted but for a moment. Before she had been able to realise the sunshine that suddenly blazed upon her life, there had as suddenly followed a blank. The bewilderment and confusion of all things, which had been great enough before, were by this brought to a climax. Norman's declaration or half-declaration completed the cutting off of her heart and existence from every ancient tie. She dared not seek light in the chaos of her mind from any one near her. She dared not betray it to the tender ears of the old people who would not understand, to whom she could not say all. To whom could she say all?—to no one, no one on earth. She had to fall back upon herself, a creature straying about in worlds not realised. Andrew appeared to her through the mists like the vision of a nightmare, whose approach would be death. Never, even when no distraction was in her mind, when he was the most near and the most natural of all companions, had she been able to tolerate the idea of a closer union. She had vaguely looked for something to happen, to prevent any further *rapprochement*. She had surrounded herself with reasons why no further step should be taken. But she had never felt as now the horror of the bond which held her like iron—which she had escaped from, yet from which she never could escape. And, on the other hand, scarcely less terrible was the brighter vision which had burst upon her in one dazzling, bewildering blaze—the revelation which at first seemed to be that of Norman Bellendean's love for her, but which soon settled into a shameful, terrible consciousness of her love for him. He had lighted up that blaze, and then he had disappeared out of her life, leaving her to contend alone with this discovery and consciousness. He had not asked for an answer from her—he had only asked to come back. And he had not come back; he had disappeared as if he had never existed, only leaving this revelation, this overturn of everything—the glory, the horror, the shame.

Joyce, it is true, had been absent for a great part of this blank period of darkness through which no word or sign of life had come. She had been taken away into new scenes, into a new world, the novelty and delight of which might have saved her had she ever remained long enough in one place to realise and understand it. But it was only to her of all her party that Switzerland was a novelty. Her father and his wife were accustomed to travel. They moved from one tourist centre to another carrying

all their usual habits with them, possessing a terrible monotony of acquaintance with everything there was to do and to see. Mrs. Hayward took Mont Blanc as calmly as she did the river of which she felt her own lawn and trees to be one of the great charms. The Colonel thought more of the occasional old Indian comrade whom he would meet in one of the big noisy hotels, than of all the mysteries of the Alps.

Joyce had therefore little aid in healing her wounds herself, as she might have done, by that strong fascination of nature to which her spirit was so open. The mountains were not still to her, nor was there solitude to be found in the wildest ravine. She was taken there in the midst of a party which discussed their usual concerns, and were intent upon luncheon at the usual hour. The snowy peaks only formed a new background for the prattle of common life, for talk about St. Augustine and the new parsonage. The new world was to her like the old, only more bewildering—a phantasmagoria in which the great and the petty were jumbled together,—the great too cold and unfamiliar to reach her soul, the petty like a babbling torrent carrying her away. Oh for the crags of Arthur's Seat and the sea coming in about them! Oh for the quiet where thought is possible! But then with a shiver poor Joyce felt that there was nothing for her but flight from the dear familiar scenes, and from the very stillness for which her heart craved. For the one was full of conflicting passions and the other of conflicting thoughts. Of all places in the world, that place which, with the obstinacy of the heart, she still called home was the most impossible to her. She dared not even turn her face in that direction, lest the subdued struggle within her might become a real conflict. For there was all that she dreaded as well as all that she loved.

And even when the travelling was over things did not mend. Summer was gone, and all its events. She came back to a blank, to the level of an existence no longer new to her, but which she had never learned to love. The sudden blaze of awakening, of enlightenment, of delight and misery, had ceased, as suddenly as it rose. She never now heard Norman Bellendean's name. He did not come, he gave no sign: he might be dead, or gone back to India, or in the farthest part of the earth, for anything she knew. He had disappeared as if he never had been, leaving in her heart and mind only the miserable consciousness that she loved him—oh, shame to think of! She so proud in her reserve and maidenly withdrawal! she, affianced to another man! she, Joyce, who had been so proud! She felt herself, she who had

been a kind of princess in her own thoughts, reduced to the humble state of the Eastern handmaiden, waiting till perhaps some token of favour might be shown to her,—some word upon which she could build her hopes. It is rare that any shame, real and deserved, is felt with the same sting of suffering and self-horror as attends the altogether fantastic shame of a sensitive girl, when she finds that she has given her love unsought. It was torture and misery to Joyce. To allow to herself that she was disappointed—that her ear was always intent on every coming step, her heart ready to beat loudly for every sudden call, filled her with a bitterness of humiliation such as crime itself would scarcely bring. But nobody had any clue to these thoughts. Her father saw nothing but that his daughter became every day more delightful to him, more indispensable. Mrs. Hayward, with a faint disdain which it pleased her to be able to entertain for her husband's daughter, concluded that Joyce, whom everybody thought so clever, was in reality dull. She had not shown any appreciation of Switzerland. She was a girl who might know books, perhaps, but nothing else. She had not cared for the mountains. It was impossible not to allow that Mrs. Hayward was rather satisfied on the whole that this should be. Perhaps only old Janet, with a sore and sad heart, felt that something was amiss. She did not know what it was that was wanting, but something was wanting. The letters which Peter found an inexhaustible source of happiness were to her dark. She could not see her child through them. 'There is something the matter,' Janet said to herself. But nobody else divined, and to no one did Joyce breathe a word.

It was in this condition that she had begun the sunshiny, hazy, November day. It was Friday, the Friday of the winter Preachings, the Fast-day in Bellendean. She had remembered this when she set out with Colonel Hayward for their morning walk, with a tender thought of Janet in her great shawl, and Peter in his Sunday clothes, sitting in the kirk in rustic state and religious *recueillement*. And now the blank was broken, the silence disturbed, but not as she thought.

'My dear, don't you be afraid—I am here to protect you, Joyce, your father is surely good for that. This man can do nothing, nothing. Thank God that you don't love him—that there is not *that* to struggle against.'

'Father, it is quite true. Oh, I have behaved badly—I am not fit to be among honourable folk. I have not respected my word.'

'Stuff and nonsense, my dear. What did a girl like you know? He took advantage of your ignorance. You could never have—cared for that fellow, Joyce.' The Colonel himself blushed at the thought.

Joyce made no reply.

'He took advantage of your inexperience—he never could have been a match for you. I remember—he was there that afternoon in the cottage. He tried to thrust his claims upon me, but Norman Bellendean took him off me. Ah, Norman Bellendean!'

The Colonel broke off quickly. He was not clear about it at all, but he remembered that Elizabeth—that there was something about Bellendean. He stopped confused; and, with a sudden start, Joyce raised herself from the sofa. He had brought her to life, though he did not know it, by that violent stimulant. 'I must not,' she said, in a broken voice, 'go back from my word.'

'I set you free from it,' said the Colonel. 'You were under age. You had no right to bind yourself. I set you free from it.'

She shook her head at him with a wistful smile. 'It was once thought a priest could do that,' she said.

'I am not a priest, but I am your father, Joyce. I set you free from it. It is in the Bible—you know your Bible better than I do. I set you free from it. You had no right to bind yourself.'

She shook her head still. 'I cannot get any comfort out of that. I was a woman, well knowing what I was doing.'

'My dear, you are not of age even now.'

'Oh, father,' she cried, 'don't say anything to me. I cannot go back from my word.'

'Joyce, I hear my wife coming back. I am not clever, I know. Elizabeth is the one to tell us what to do. If she will only take it up—if you will let her take it up.'

Joyce rose quickly to her feet. 'Not now—not now. I couldn't speak to any one. Father, you must let me settle it by myself.'

'Joyce! Oh, have confidence in us both, Joyce!'

Joyce escaped from his restraining hand and imploring look. She hastened out of one door while Mrs. Hayward entered by the other, and, with her limbs trembling under her, got to the refuge of her own room, where at least there was no one to question her, and tell her what she ought to do. She was not capable of any more. She threw herself down in a chair, and did not move for hours, turning it over and over—helplessly over and over in her mind. It was all she could do. The scene through which she

had just passed repeated itself before her—every word that had been said, every look. When she was called to go downstairs for lunch, she made excuses for herself she knew not what, and sat there with a sort of helpless craving only to be alone—to be left to herself—through all the daylight hours. It seemed to Joyce that everything else had disappeared for ever, that every vision of her soul was gone,—that Andrew alone stood before her, the only stable and steadfast thing. She saw him before her eyes all the time, with all his imperfections. There had never been any glamour in her eyes to blind her to these. His familiar aspect, with which she had grown unfamiliar, came back to her with all the force at once of recollection and of new discovery. He had come to claim her, and he had a right to claim her ; and how could she resist that claim ? He had not hesitated, nor had he been cowed even by her dread of him, by her father's vehemence. He had stood for his rights like a man. A respect for the man at whom she shuddered, whose approach was dreadful to her, had come into Joyce's mind : even with strange inconsistency she was half proud of him in his immovableness—in the resolution and force he had shown. She tried to face it all calmly, to contemplate her fate,—to ask herself whether, perhaps, her old life, the duties to which she had been born, were not after all the best, the only existence for her ? There would be plenty to do, there would not be much time to think. The clamour of the school, and all the old emulations, and the ambitions which at once seemed enough to fill any mind, would shut out all echoes and banish all ghosts. Only for a few months had she been absent—not enough to change her habits, to change the fashion of her mind. Why should she resist and strive against her fate ?

She tried to soothe and put away other visions by that—the school, the children's looks of interest, the clinging of the girls about her, the books in which she could always escape from all that troubled her. With her trembling hands clasped, with her eyes in an abstract gaze, she saw all these things again, and for a moment her heart beat calm. But then once more, with a sudden flash, with a start, with a cry of horror, she recognised in front of all, him—Andrew—as he had stood before her to-day, as she remembered him, as he was and had always been. Joyce sprang to her feet to escape that steady, calm, immovable image. She put her hands over her hot eyes, but could not shut it out. She paced about her room, but could not get beyond the place in which he stood. He filled all the sphere of her vision, as he would fill her whole life. Oh, how to escape—how to escape ! Oh for the

wings of a dove!—but where to fly? She flung herself down on her knees by the side of her bed. Sometimes in that attitude merely there is a relief. She was not praying, but laying her heart with all its confusions, its whirl of contradictory thoughts, its wild longings for escape, open where God could see it, calling wistfully His attention to it as human creatures will, in human forgetfulness that everywhere and in all attitudes He sees, and does not neglect.

Later in the afternoon Joyce stole out to seek counsel from the evening breeze and the cold flow of the river. She was afraid to go beyond the limits of the garden and grounds lest she should meet him alone, and forestall the decision of her fate. The November evening was chill with cold dews falling, the grass penetrated with wet, the half-naked trees all heavy with moisture, sprinkling cold showers over her when the breeze moved them. She went down to the river-edge, and looked out upon it in the grey of the twilight, flowing, glistening, giving back the little light there was. A boat was drawn up here and there on the bank, but there was none on the stream, which, swollen with early rains, and bearing on its dark clear surface specks of the leaves that every air swept off the overhanging trees, flowed on through the darkness, a ceaseless wayfarer. The willows, still in ragged robes of pale yellow, gave a faint light to the darkling scene. Joyce leant over, almost feeling the sweep of the stream, and there came upon her a strong temptation to detach the boat that lay within her reach, and trust herself to the flowing water and the night. The possibilities of that flight came before her instantaneously like a picture. The stream itself would carry her along; the movement itself would soothe her troubled spirit. She seemed to feel the rush of the water under the bridge, to see the lights of the town twinkling reflected on the water, the opening of the dim evening skies beyond, the dark shadows of barges and ships as the widening stream flowed on. She saw in a moment all the dark panorama float past her, the increasing rush of the Thames, the sound of its gurgle in her ears, the growing dangers of the darkness, and the crowded ways. The little boat might go down under the bows of some monster in the dark, and no one ever know what young despairing heart was in it. She saw, too, the dark mass heaving up high above, the frail little vessel turning over, the choking inky stream, and drew back with a low cry of terror. It was indeed a kind of despair which was closing round her, but she wanted to escape and not to die—not yet to die.

The shuddering of that sensation brought her back slowly away

from the dark fascination of the flowing water. She came back picking her steps across the wet grass, chilled by the damp and the dark, the cold raindrops suspended on the branches coming down upon her in an icy shower as she passed under the trees. The lights in the windows, the warmth of the house, shone through the twilight, attracting her, putting forth a strong appeal. But what was warmth and shelter to freedom, if she could but get her freedom and escape from it all? Joyce had got beyond all power of thinking. Her mind saw pictures, visions of what might be, as more reasonable people see the motives and arguments which tell for or against every course of action. As she turned her face from the river and reached the gravel path, there suddenly came before her a vision of a still and quiet country road, such as she had seen in her walks, leading far away into far level distances, the long perspective of the low-lying country. She bethought herself of a dozen turns and byways, all leading into the unknown. She saw them stretching for miles and miles, leading the wayfarer far out of sight of every one who knew her, and the dark line of the hedgerows that would keep her from straying, and the sleeping villages she would pass through. There would be no dangers in a country road, and she was strong: she could go a long way without requiring to pause. There would be ten hours of darkness in which she could walk on. She was not afraid of her strength failing. And at the end surely there would be some quiet place where nobody would ever think of finding a strayed creature. It would be like falling and disappearing through Mirza's bridge. Joyce stood still for a moment, moved by a wild prick of that unreasoning impulse which was in her blood. By the side of the house was a dim opening which admitted to that world, strange, dark, and cold, in which a poor girl could lose herself who had no true place, no natural nest in the other. She paused for a moment, clasping her hands, appealing to she knew not what—not God this time: there are moments when the bewildered soul becomes pagan in its broken faith—to something, she knew not what, above, around.

The lamp had been lighted in the drawing-room, but no curtains drawn or shutters closed. Another picture, a real one, caught her eyes there as she hesitated, standing on the edge. She was close to the verandah upon which the window opened, and she heard the sound of the voices within, now raised, now sinking low. The sudden spell of a stronger interest seized upon Joyce. She came forward a few steps at a time, unwilling and yet eager, until she commanded a full view of the party within. Her father stood

facing the window. He was talking with much vehemence, referring occasionally to his wife, who sat in her usual place, a very watchful spectator—now and then breaking off with a flourish of his hand, as a man does when he has said something unanswerable. With his back towards the window, Andrew sat squarely on a chair, his hat at his feet. There came upon Joyce an impulse of painful laughter in the midst of her misery. It was a look, an attitude she knew so well—ludicrously, horribly familiar in this crisis of her fate,—for it was her fate, her life or death, they were deciding, while he sat there like a rock, unconvincible, immovable, as he had sat through many a discussion that mattered nothing. For who could ever convince Andrew? She drew closer in the sudden smart of the recollection, the keen sense of incongruity, the reality of this scene dispersing every vision. The living drama, in which she was herself the chief figure, had a stronger force than any imagination. She went into the verandah, to the window against which, on the other side, she had leant in the morning. It was not fastened, and yielded to her touch. They all turned upon her at the sound of the faint cry she gave.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE light dazzled her as she came into the warm room, in the midst of this conference. Colonel Hayward started forward to meet her, and his wife rose from her chair. But Andrew did not budge. In his world no such respectful movement was thought of; and in times of excitement he had not leisure to think, nor note what others did.

'Joyce, why are you here?' her father said hastily.

'Joyce, you will come with me,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'Let the gentlemen settle this matter. Come with me.'

'Joyce,' said Andrew, 'in justice to me you will remain here.'

She stood looking from one to another with eyes still wild with her secret dreams and projects, which no one suspected, and the drops of cold dew glittering in her hair. 'Father,' she said, 'you know I must stay. I cannot leave it to you, as if—as if—you had known it all the time.'

'Joyce sees what is just,' said Andrew. 'There was neither father nor mother between us. She decided for herself, and she will have to decide for herself again. Cornel, leave her alone.' He spoke with great composure in his ordinary tone. 'I will take no answer from you, but I'll abide by what she says.'

'She is under age,' said Colonel Hayward. 'Sir, if you were a little better acquainted with ordinary rules, you would know it is her father only who has the right to reply to you.'

'And how do you know, Cornel, that she is under age? Were you there when she was born? Were you near at hand to see your child? What do you know about her more than any passer-by?'

'Sir!' cried Colonel Hayward, stammering with indignation, 'you presume upon the shelter of my roof, and on being beneath—beneath my notice.'

'Not beneath being your son-in-law,' Andrew said.

'Joyce,' said Mrs. Hayward angrily, 'either put a stop to this

at once, or come with me and let your father settle it. You make everything worse by being here.'

Joyce stood between them trembling, unable to command, as she had once so vainly thought she could, the situation in which she found herself. Oh, how much easier to fly, either by the dark river or the darker country! 'I will respect my father,' she said, 'in everything—in everything—but——'

The last word did not reach the Colonel's ear. He drew her hand within his arm. 'Thank you, my dear,' he said. 'Then it is all right. Mr. Halliday, or whatever your name is, there must be no more of this. I might lose my temper. I might forget that you are under my roof. Don't you hear what my daughter has said? In such a matter a gentleman gives way at once. It's no question of love.' He pressed Joyce's trembling hand in his arm. 'If you've any regard for her, sir, or for your own character, you'll go away and disturb her no more.'

Andrew had risen slowly to his feet. He came forward with his hand raised, as if he were about to address a class. 'You'll observe,' he said, 'that the circumstances only, and not the persons, are changed. It was a question of love six months ago. I was a man in a good position, my father very respectable, a little money in the family. And she was Joyce, a female teacher, with nobody to stand for her but Peter Matheson, a ploughman.'

'You insult me, sir,' cried Colonel Hayward—'you insult my daughter!' He held her hand close, pressing it in his to console her. 'My poor Joyce, my poor child!' he exclaimed.

'Nevertheless,' said Andrew, with composure, 'it is true. Joyce knows that it is true. My mother, who expresses herself strongly, put it in other words: It was said I was throwing myself away. I did not think so; but that being the case, Colonel, you need not think I will be daunted because she is your daughter, or any man's daughter. She's Joyce—and engaged to me.'

'Leave my house, sir,' cried the Colonel. 'You have insulted my child. For that there is no excuse and no pardon. Leave my house.'

'Father,' said Joyce, 'it's no insult—it is all true. I am always Joyce, whatever I am besides. And when I was poor, it was thought a—credit to me. He should not have said it, but it's true. I never thought of that, and he should not have said it: but it's true. He held out his hand to me when I was—beneath him.'

'Joyce!'

'Yes, I see it all, though I did not think of it then. Oh,

excuse him! He does not know a man should never say that! They do it and think no harm where we come from. We were common folk. He did me honour, and am I to do him discredit? I cannot, I cannot. I must keep to my word.'

'Joyce, for heaven's sake, don't act like a mad woman! Come away with me and let them settle it,' cried Mrs. Hayward, seizing her arm on the other side.

'Joyce behaves just as I should have expected from her,' said Andrew, facing this agitated group with his own supreme self-possession and calm. 'I knew I could not be deceived. I am willing to make every allowance for your feelings, Cornel. You naturally look for a richer man than me to be your daughter's husband. I respect even the prejudices of a man like you. But there is no real reason to be disturbed about that. I am a young man. I have always been successful, so far as has been in my power. There is no need for me to remain in the humble place I now fill. With your interest and my own merits——'

'Good Lord!' the Colonel cried. He dropped his daughter's arm in his consternation, and stood with his lips apart, with a stare of horror.

'My own merits,' repeated Andrew, 'I think we might soon so modify the circumstances that you need object no longer. I am not afraid of the circumstances,' he said, with a smile of complaisance. 'You can tell your father, Joyce, what testimonials——'

'Father,' said Joyce eagerly, with a burning blush, 'he is to be excused. That is how they think where—where we came from. He is—not a gentleman: we were—common folk. Father, he means it all right, though he does not know. He's good, though—though he speaks another language.' Her own horror and dismay took the form of apology. She was roused by her consternation into full and eager life.

'And you hold by this man, Joyce, and you plead for him!' Colonel Hayward cried.

'You will understand, Cornel,' said Andrew, who had drawn himself up indignantly, and sacrificed all the advantage of his self-possession in sudden discomposure and resentment, 'that I ask nobody to plead for me. Joyce has been carried away with trying to please both parties. She is sacrificing me to soothe you down. Women will do such things; they will not learn. But for my part, I reject her excuses. I'll have no forbearance on that score,' cried Andrew, holding up his head and throwing back his shoulders. 'I stand upon my own merits as between man and man.'

Then the Joyce of other days found words—not the tremulous girl, all strange in strange places, who was Colonel Hayward's daughter, but the swift speaking, high-handed Joyce, the possible princess, the lady born of Janet's cottage. 'Oh,' she cried, her words pouring forth on a sudden passionate breath, 'how dare you bring up your merits here, and all your worldly thoughts! My old grandfather was but a ploughman, but he was a gentleman like my father. He would have put you to the door if you had said all that to him. And you stand before a man that has fought, and has the Queen's medals on his breast—that has been wounded in battle, and faced cannon and sword; and before a lady that has no knowledge of the ways of common folk; and before me, that you said you loved; and you stand up and tell them of the female teacher that you held out your hand to, and of your merits, that make you good enough for the best—for Colonel Hayward's daughter, that is a great soldier, a great captain, far too noble and great to put you to the door like Peter Matheson. Oh, Andrew Halliday, for shame, for shame!—you, after all the books you have read, and all the fine words you have said. I am ashamed myself,' said Joyce, turning from him with a proud despair, 'for I thought that Shakespeare and all the poets would make a gentleman even out of the commonest clay.'

Andrew bore this without quailing, with a smile on his face. When she stopped, he drew a long breath, and turned with an explanatory air to Colonel Hayward. 'That is just one of her old tirades,' he said.

The Colonel paid him no attention: he put his arm round his daughter, as tremulous as she was. 'Joyce,' he said faltering—'Joyce, my dear child, you see it all. You see through him, and—and all of us. Thank God that it's all over now!'

Joyce drew back from him, trembling with the reaction from her own excitement. The flush that had given her a temporary brilliancy and force faded away. 'But yet that alters nothing,' she said.

Mrs. Hayward put her hand upon the girl's arm with an impatient pressure. 'Do you mean that you are going to marry that man, Joyce?'

'Mr. Halliday,' said the Colonel, 'I hope, after what my daughter has said, that you will see the inexpediency of—of continuing this discussion. She has her ideas of honour, which are a little overstrained—overstrained, as is perhaps natural; but she sees all the discrepancies—all the—— You know, you must see that it's quite impossible. My consent you will never get—never!

and as for Joyce, she will not—you can see by what she has said—go against me.’

‘She will never go against her word.’

‘Oh, this is endless!’ the Colonel cried. ‘We may go on contradicting each other till doomsday. You understand that I will hear no more, and that Joyce, as she has told you, will hear no more.’

‘She may object to my manners, Cornel, but she will keep her word to me,’ said Andrew, regaining all the force of his conviction. ‘But, as you say, it is little use bandying words. I will withdraw. I have made a long journey for very little—not half-a-dozen words by ourselves with the young lady to whom I am engaged to be married. But I will not keep up a needless discussion. She understands me, and you understand. If you meet me in a friendly spirit, everything may yet be arranged for the best; if not, she will be of age at least in a year, and we will have no need of your consent. Joyce,’ he said, suddenly, making a quick step towards her, seizing her hand, ‘I’ll bid you good-bye, my dearest. You’ll mind your honour and duty to me. Rich or poor, high or low, makes no difference. You have my word, and I have yours. Have you any message for the old folk.’

‘Andrew!’ she said, trembling. She had shrunk back for the first moment, but now held herself upright, very tremulous, leaving her hand in his, with an evident great exertion of her will. Her lips quivered, too, and she said no more.

‘I understand,’ he said, in a soothing tone, putting his other hand for a moment over hers. ‘Well, if that’s all, it will have to do. Good-bye, Joyce—but not for long. I have learned the road to you, and it shall not be untrudged. We’ll meet soon—without other eyes always on us. Good-bye. I put my full trust in you. You will mind your word and your duty, Joyce. Good evening, madam. Cornel, you will understand that we are agreed, she and I.’

‘I understand nothing of the sort, sir! On the contrary, I forbid you my house, sir! I will give orders——’

‘Good-bye, Cornel,’ said Andrew, with a smile. He gathered up his hat from the floor, waved his hand with a general leave-taking, and walked to the door. ‘You will hear from me very soon, Joyce, my dear,’ he said, looking round before he finally disappeared. He went out, he felt, with all the honours of war.

It was very near the dinner hour, and Baker was busy in the dining-room. Andrew had to let himself out. He did so with a reflection that to have been asked to stay to dinner, as was his due,

would have been much more agreeable ; yet with another reflection following, that probably in this house they went through the somewhat mysterious ceremony called dressing for dinner, and that he had no means of altering his costume. The odour that filled the house was very agreeable ; and however unhappy or even tragical this interview had been to the others, it was not so to Andrew. He had calculated upon opposition. He had calculated, too, with certainty upon Joyce's fidelity to her word. There had been, it was true, that tirade—which did not in the least surprise him—which was quite natural, much more like the Joyce he knew than was the dignified silent young lady who had first appeared to him. He could forgive her the tirade. Otherwise he felt that he had lost nothing. He knew exactly the position the parents would take up, and he did not even despair that when they fully saw the situation, they would be moved to make the best of it, and that even the headmastership might still be within reach. He went out, carefully closing the door behind him, a little disgusted about the dinner, not discouraged about anything else, and met at the gate, coming in, the lady who had directed him, so clearly that he could not miss it, to Colonel Hayward's door. There was a lamp not far from the gate, and some light came from the gas-light in the hall, which revealed him to her before he could close the door.

'Oh !' she cried, in a breathless, rapid way ; 'so you found the place.'

'Yes, madam,' said Andrew, mindful of his p's and q's. He felt that in addressing a lady, especially one whom he did not know, it was the safest course to err by a little more, not less, respect. 'Yes, thanks to you.'

'And you found them—you found her? It was Joyce you wanted, I feel sure.'

'Yes, it was Joyce I wanted.'

'Oh ! this is so interesting,' Mrs. Sitwell cried—'so interesting ! I know her very well, and I take the greatest interest in her. You are—an old friend, I am sure?'

'Yes, an old friend—a very old friend,' said Andrew,—'a very warm friend ; something—something more than a friend, if the truth were known.'

'Oh !' cried the little lady, clasping her hands together, 'this is more interesting than I can say. Let me go back with you a little, Mr.—Mr.—'

'Halliday—my name is Halliday. She has spoken of me, no doubt.'

'I am so glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Halliday. I really must walk with you a little way. I was going to see Joyce, but I am sure she has something else to think of, and it is a little too late. By the way, I suppose you are going back there to dinner?'

'It is natural to think so,' said Andrew with a grim little laugh, 'but no.'

'No?' cried Mrs. Sitwell. Her curiosity, her interest in this drama, her determination to know everything, rose to fever-heat. She had taken him all in at the first glance, when she had met him in the morning: his long—too long—coat, his round hat, the colour of his gloves. Her eyes danced with eagerness and interest. She could scarcely contain herself.

'No,' he said; 'I am not good enough for Cornel Hayward's daughter. You may be surprised—but, so far as lies with the old people, I am sent away.'

'Sent away!' she repeated, with a little shriek. ('And not much wonder!' she said to herself.) 'You must not think it mere curiosity,' she cried; 'I am so interested in dear Joyce. Ah, please tell me. I shall see her to-morrow, and if I can be of any use, or take her any message——'

'It is unnecessary,' said Andrew, with a wave of his hand. 'I know Joyce, and she understands me.'

'I can't tell you,' said Mrs. Sitwell, 'how interesting all this is to me. Though I have never seen you before, Mr. Halliday, I feel that I know you through dear Joyce. I wonder, as you are not dining at the Haywards', if you would come and take your evening meal with my husband and me—Rev. Austin Sitwell, St. Augustine's. You must have heard of my husband; he would be charmed to make your acquaintance. We don't say we dine, you know; we are quite poor people, and don't make any fuss; but we will give you something to eat—and true sympathy,' cried the parson's wife, with a little friendly touch of her hand upon his arm.

'I am sure you are exceedingly kind,' said Andrew. He was a little alarmed, if truth must be told. Had it happened in London, he would at once have understood that a snare of some sort was being laid for him; but as he was at some distance from London, he was only doubtful, slightly alarmed, and uneasy. He reflected, however, that he had all his wits about him, and was not a man to be led into a snare; and he did not know (though he had heard of a place called the Star and Garter) where to go for a dinner; and he had great need of some one to speak to—to

open his heart to. And certainly she had been going to Colonel Hayward's when he met her, and knew Joyce, and therefore was a person who could be trusted. He thought, on the whole, he might venture to accept the invitation, secure of being able to take care of himself, whatever happened. 'You are exceedingly kind,' he said again; 'I should be very glad, ma'am, to make your husband's acquaintance. He will be of the Established Church, no doubt? It would be a pleasure to compare experience, especially in the way of schools.'

'Have you to do with schools?' she asked.

Andrew turned in the lamplight to cast a glance of inquiry at the ignorant little person beside him. 'Surely,' he said, in a tone of suppressed surprise,—'what else? as my poor Joyce was, too, before it all came out. You speak of poverty, which I don't doubt is a figure of speech so far as you are concerned—but Joyce was in a very humble position, though always above it in her mind, before the Cornel came.'

'This is more interesting than ever,' cried the parson's wife, clasping her hands.

'My only trouble was that my family were not very well content, constantly throwing it in my teeth that I might have done better,' said Andrew; 'which makes it the more wonderful,' he added, with a faint laugh, 'to be put to the door as it were, and told I am not good enough for the Cornel's daughter? It is a turning of the tables which I never looked to see.'

'But nothing will shake Joyce—Joyce will always be faithful,' Mrs. Sitwell cried.

'Oh yes, Joyce—Joyce has a high sense of duty; and besides, she knows my position, which an ignorant officer and his wife are not likely to do. I am not afraid of Joyce,' he added, with sedate self-confidence. 'She is a good girl. She knows what she owes to me.'

'This way, Mr. Halliday,' cried Mrs. Sitwell. 'Ours is only a little place, but you will have a warm welcome. I must hear all about you and Joyce.'

He was a stranger, and she took him in—there could not have been a more Christian act. And such acts often have their recompense here, without waiting for that final reward which is promised. Andrew became very watchful and suspicious when he found himself face to face with a clerical person in a coat much longer than his own, and a costume which recalled in a general way what he had heard of Jesuits—a name of terror. He was much on his guard for the first hour. But after supper Mrs.

Sitwell's magic began to tell. Notwithstanding his self-control, he could not but be sore and injured, and to be able to speak and unburden himself was a relief indescribable. He fell into the snare delicately arranged around his feet. Mrs. Sitwell's keen little eyes danced with delight. She wiped off a tiny fictitious tear when she had drawn it all out, one detail after another. 'I shall go and see her to-morrow,' she cried. 'I will give her a kiss and say, You dear girl, now I know all.'

'It is all to her credit—nothing but to her credit,' said Andrew.

The Rev. Austin had a meeting on his hands, and had been obliged to go out, leaving the new acquaintance to be dissected at his wife's pleasure. He was uneasy about the adventure altogether. 'A fellow like that,' he cried,—'would you let him marry one of your sisters, Dora?'

'Yes, dear, if he were rich enough,' cried his wife. 'But to think what a romance it has been all the time. How astonished everybody will be. I am not going to publish it abroad——'

'I hope not, I hope not, Dora.'

'But naturally I will tell the people who are most interested in her,' Mrs. Sitwell said. .

Mrs. Sitwell took charge of Andrew as if he had been a respectable tramp. She procured him a lodging for the night, having got every detail out of him that it was possible to gather. He had to leave early the next morning, which was a relief; and she could scarcely sleep all night for excitement and satisfaction. She felt like the finder of a treasure—like a great inventor or poet. To whom should she communicate first this wonderful piece of news? It would act as a stimulant in the dull season all over the place. 'Don't talk of it?' she said to her husband, who acted his usual part of wet blanket to subdue her ardour; 'oh no, not in society generally—I hope you know me better than that, Austin. I will only tell a few of her friends—her friends ought to know. What a showing up it will be of those Haywards! I never liked that woman. I see now why she has been so anxious to keep everything quiet. No, I shall not talk of it—except to Joyce's friends; for it is all to Joyce's credit,—all, all!' Mrs. Sitwell said.

CHAPTER XXXVII

'CANON, what does this story mean which I meet wherever I go? I heard it at the St. Clairs' yesterday, but took no notice, and to-day there's poor Lady Thompson bursting and panting—what does it all mean?'

'I should be better able to answer if you told me what it was.'

'That is just like a man,' cried Mrs. Jenkinson, 'as if you did not know! When any gossip is going it always gets here first of all. I believe you have a telephone, or whatever you call them. Is there anything in it? What is the meaning of it? You have always had a fancy for the girl, more than I saw any reason for—but that's your way.'

'The girl,' said the Canon. 'I suppose you mean old Hayward's girl. Well, and what do they say?'

'I am very surprised that you should ask me; and now I feel sure there must be something in it,' Mrs. Jenkinson cried.

'That she was a schoolmistress, or something of that sort? I always suspected as much. The mother was a governess—and if Hayward left her, as he seems to have done, with poor relations—and what then, my dear?' said the Canon briskly. 'Eh? that doesn't alter the fact that she's a very nice girl.'

'It alters the situation,' said the Canon's wife. 'Miss Beachey is a very nice girl; but I should not ask her to meet the St. Clairs, for example, in my drawing-room.'

'Empty-headed noodles,' said the Canon. 'Miss Beachey is worth the whole bundle of them; but I hope you don't compare Miss Beachey with Joyce.'

'If that were all!' said the lady, shaking her head. 'I hear now that's not half. They say she's nothing to the Haywards at all—only a girl that took their fancy, and that they took out of her natural position——'

'I'll swear she never took Mrs. Hayward's fancy, Charlotte!'

'Well, well. Mrs. Hayward is a woman of sense; she knows it is vain to go against a man when he has taken a notion in his head. The Colonel saw her, it appears, and thought her like his first wife. These romantic plans never succeed. It appears she was engaged to a man in her own class, and he has been here making a disturbance. I am very distressed for these poor people. Well? You know all about it, of course, a great deal better than I do.'

'My dear, I think that notion of yours about a telephone is quite just. Of course I have heard it all—first, that she had been a schoolmarm, as these troublesome Americans say (we'll all find ourselves speaking American one of these days), then a board schoolmistress, additional horror! Yesterday, however, nobody had any doubt she was old Hayward's daughter. The other thing has come up to-day. I don't believe a word of it, if that's any satisfaction to you.'

'It is very little satisfaction to me, Canon,' said Mrs. Jenkinson, shaking her head, 'for I know how you are swayed by your feelings. You like her, therefore nothing that tells against her can be true. But unfortunately I can't give up my judgment in that way.'

'What has your judgment got to do with it? That's a big thing to be put in movement for such a small matter,' said the Canon, pushing his chair from the table. The rotundity of the vast black-silk waistcoat burst forth from under that shadow with an imposing air. He crossed one leg over the other, filling half the vacant space with a neat foot in a black gaiter and well-brushed shoe.

'I don't call it a small matter. I am very surprised that you should think so. A Scotch country girl, with a pupil-teacher's training, brought among us—presented to us all as a young lady!'

'Well, wasn't she a young lady? What fault have you to find with her? She puts me to my p's and q's, I can tell you, with what you call her pupil-teacher's——' The Canon changed his position impatiently, bringing his other foot into that elevated position. 'It's all a horrid nuisance!' he cried. 'I don't know when I've been more vexed. Hayward's an old fool—I always knew it. I wish they had never settled here.'

'I knew you'd think so, Canon,' Mrs. Jenkinson cried.

'What was the good, if you knew I'd think so, of aggravating everything? I'll tell you what it is,—it's those pernicious people at St. Augustine's. That woman *must* be in mischief. I told you so. She can't keep out of it. And to fall foul of the

people who have been her best friends ! But for that poor girl, whom she's fixing her fangs in, neither old Sam nor I would have moved a step. I've a great mind to go and stop the building. It would serve them right.'

'I don't defend Dora Sitwell, Canon ; but if there had been nothing wrong she could not have made a story. It is the people who shock all the instincts of society and break its rules—as the Haywards have done——'

'Well, I said he was an old fool,' said the Canon, getting up and marching about the room, which shook and creaked under him—the windows rattling, the boards bending. 'I give him up to you—flay him alive, if you like—— Still, at the same time,' he added, stopping in front of her, with his long coat swinging, and his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, 'if a man should happen by any misfortune to find his own child in an inferior position—suppose she had been a housemaid instead of a board schoolmistress—should he have left her there? is that what you ladies think the right thing to do? Respect the delicate breeding of girls who have run about town for two or three seasons, and don't bring the rustic Una here.'

'The Una !' said Mrs. Jenkinson. 'Canon, when you are very excited, you always become extravagant. Una was a princess, not a schoolmistress. Oh yes, of course, it's all one in a fairy tale ; but a Una, with a lover who comes and makes a disturbance——! And besides, everybody says she's not their daughter—only a country girl to whom they took a fancy.'

'A strange fancy on the wife's part !'

'I do wish you would be reasonable. The wife, of course, saw the difficulties, poor woman ! Very likely she disapproved of all that romantic nonsense, adopting a stranger—if it had been a child even ! but a grown-up girl with a lover. It has not been for her happiness either, poor thing. To have been left in her own sphere, and married, as she would naturally have done, would have been far better. I am sorry for her, and I am sorry for Mrs. Hayward. As for him, it is all his fault, and I have no patience with him,' cried Mrs. Jenkinson. 'You are quite right, Canon ; he is an old fool.'

'Still, I don't see, if he had been Solomon, how he was to have left the poor little girl behind him when he had once found her. Do you ?'

'Canon,' said Mrs. Jenkinson, with a dignified look of reproach, 'I allow that you may be a partisan ; but don't keep up that transparent fiction with me.'

The Canon said, 'By!' in an access of feeling, and with a fling which made the rectory ring. It is not permitted to a Churchman to swear: even By Jove! comes amiss with a clerical coat and gaiters; but the use of that innocent monosyllable can be forbidden to no one—the wealthy English language would fall to pieces without it. He said 'By!' making a fling round the room which caused every window in the old house to tremble, and then he came to a sudden stop in front of his wife, like a ship arrested in full sail. 'Fiction!' he said; 'the girl's the image of her mother. My brother Jim was in Hayward's regiment. I remember the poor thing, and the marriage, and all about it. Hayward behaved like a fool in that business too—he'll probably wreck his daughter's happiness now,—but mind you, Charlotte, there's no fiction about it. You can say I said so. I mean to say so myself till I make the welkin ring—whatever that may be,' he added, with a short laugh.

'Oh, you'll make the welkin ring, I don't doubt, anyhow: but, of course, that's strong evidence, Canon—if you stick to it.'

'I'll stick to it,' Dr. Jenkinson said. 'Poor little girl! I knew she'd get into trouble; but, my dear, if I were you, I'd go forth to all the tea-parties and sweep these cobwebs away.'

'My dear, if I were you, I'd do it myself,' said the lady. 'You had better go now, while you are so hot, to Lady St. Clair's.'

The Canon flung himself down in his study chair, once more making the rectory ring. He said something about tabbies and old cats, which a clerical authority ought not to have said, and then he informed his wife that he was writing his sermon—the sermon which she knew he had to preach before a Diocesan Conference. 'I felt very much in the vein before you came in. I must try to gather together my scattered ideas.'

'You don't seem to have made much progress,' said Mrs. Jenkinson, looking severely at a blank sheet of paper on the writing-table. The Canon uttered a low chuckle of conscious guilt, and drew it towards him.

'I'll tell you what—I'll give them a good rousing sermon on scandal and tea-parties.'

'Oh, tea-parties! your clubs and things are worse than all the tea-parties in the world,' said Mrs. Jenkinson, rising with dignity. The rectory was an old house, and very ready to creak and rattle; but scarcely a window moved in its frame, or a board vibrated under her movements. The Canon's lightest gesture, when he threw himself back in his chair, or pulled it forward in the heat of composition, made every timber thrill.

Mrs. Jenkinson took her way with dainty steps along the road, where there were puddles, for it had been raining, to Lady St. Clair's. Now that the days were closing in, and winter approaching, the season of tea-parties had set in. The gardens were all bare and desolate, not so much as a belated red geranium left in the beds. Everything naked and sodden with autumn rains. But in Lady St. Clair's, who followed the fashion even in flowers, there was a sort of supernatural summer in the conservatory, a many-coloured glow of chrysanthemums which lit up one side of her drawing-room. The day was mild, the fire was hot, and so was the tea; and the crowd of people in the warm room were hot too, in their unnecessary furs and wrappings, and disposed to be sour and out of temper. Lady Thompson had got a seat near the fire; she had a cup of tea in her hand; she was being served with hot tea-cake and muffins, and she wore a sealskin cloak trimmed with deep borders of another and still more costly fur. Her good-humoured countenance was crimson, her breath came in gasps. By her side sat Mrs. Sitwell, busy and eager. 'Of course I was interested,' said the parson's wife. 'A tale of true love. We ought all to do what we can for them. You, dear Lady Thompson, that have so much influence——'

'I don't think,' said Lady St. Clair, with emphasis, 'that anything of the kind should be asked from us. We have been made to receive a girl on false pretences, who should never have been admitted among us. I always had a feeling about that girl. She was so *gauche*. One could see she had been accustomed to *no* society. And my girls had quite the same feeling. It was instinctive; one has a sort of creepy sensation just as when one rubs against some one in a crowd—some one who is not of one's own class.'

'I was always fond of 'er,' said Lady Thompson, in the middle of her muffin. 'I never 'ad no creepy feeling. If you ask my opinion, she's a pretty dear.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Sitwell, clasping her hands with enthusiasm, 'everything, everything that has come out has been favourable to Joyce!'

'Not to thrust herself into society on false pretences,' said the eldest Miss St. Clair. 'I really know nothing of her. I have been from home most of the summer; but to push her way among gentlepeople—a little schoolmistress! Why, Dolly and Daisy were very nearly making a *friend* of her!—a girl with these antecedents!'

'It was dreadful cheek,' said Dolly aforesaid.

Miss Marsham, who had been pulling the lace round her thin wrists into tatters, here put forward a timid plea. 'Oh, I am sure there was no thrusting herself forward! If there was anything, she was too shy—dear Joyce! She always said it was the schools she was interested in—from the first. Mrs. Sitwell, you remember, in Wombwell's field.'

'Oh,' cried Mrs. Sitwell, 'I never have said anything but praise of her. I think it is noble to work like that,—to exert yourself for your people. Her poor old parents were so poor, living in a wretched cottage upon oatmeal and I don't know what messes, as the Scotch do. And she occupied herself to get them a little comfort in their old days. It was noble of her; everything is to Joyce's credit—everything! Wild horses would not have drawn it out of me but for that.'

'I never 'ad no creepy feeling,' said Lady Thompson, pulling at the velvet strings of her bonnet (which had been carefully pinned, poor woman, by a careful maid). 'She's always been as nice as nice to me.'

'What seems very strange,' said another of the company, 'is that the Bellendean, really nice people, who must have known all about it, should have countenanced such an imposition; and your little cousin, Lady St. Clair.'

'Oh, Greta's a mere child,—and you know the silly ways some girls have. They think it's fine to take up people, and have a *protégée* out of their own class—bringing the rich and poor together, don't you know—that's what they say.'

'They are so silly, all those revolutionary ways!'

'And then Captain Bellendean, who should have known better, dangling after her everywhere—compromising the girl, I always said.'

'Oh, we always knew,' said Lady St. Clair, with a smile, 'that nothing would come of *that*. A young man, of course, will take his amusement where he can find it—and if a girl allows herself to be compromised it is her own fault.'

'The parents are most to blame, I think,' another lady said.

'The parents!' said Miss St. Clair, with a laugh.

'My dear Mrs. John—a mere matter of adoption, and not a successful one. Mrs. Hayward, I believe, never approved of it. It was all the Colonel's doing—a foolish fancy about a resemblance.'

'And who was she, then, to begin with?'

'A foundling—picked up by the roadside—adopted by some cottagers—the lowest of the low.'

'Oh!' cried Miss Marsham, behind backs, with a cry of pain. 'Poor child, poor dear!—if it is so, it's not her fault.'

Mrs. Sitwell had grown pale. She was not done up in velvet strings like Lady Thompson, who sat gasping, making vain efforts to release herself, unable to speak. 'I don't think it is so bad as that. I never said—I was never told—only poor people, that was all—poor village people—very respectable. And everything to Joyce's credit, or I never should have said a word.'

Mr. Sitwell and Mr. Bright had come in from one of their many services in the pause of awe which followed the severe statement of Joyce's fabulous origin. 'Who was that?' said the curate, in Miss Dolly's ear.

'Oh, the girl at the Haywards'—don't you know? You ought to know, for you saw a great deal of her in the summer. You ought to have found out all her secrets.'

'I never pry into a lady's secrets,' said the curate.

'Oh, don't you just! But she turns out to be nothing and nobody, though they took her everywhere. Did you ever hear such awful cheek?'

'I always tell you, Miss Dolly, human nature is so depraved—except in some exceptional cases,' Mr. Bright said, with an ingratiating smile, bending over the young lady's chair.

Mr. Sitwell asked the same question of the elder circle, standing up in the severity of his clerical coat amid the group of ladies. Two or three answered him at once.

'It is Joyce, Austin,' his wife said, in a faint voice.

'It is Miss Hayward.'

'It is,' said Lady St. Clair, emphatically, 'the young person—Colonel Hayward's *protégée*—whose appearance has always been such a wonder to us.'

'Dora,' the parson said, in consternation, 'you never told me this.'

'Oh no—oh no. I told Lady St. Clair so. It was not half so much, not half so much! only that they were poor people, quite respectable; and that Colonel Hayward recognised her directly. Didn't I say so? I never, never meant it to be understood——'

'Mrs. Sitwell evidently thinks—which is a pity—that all my information on the subject is derived from her,' Lady St. Clair said. 'She forgets that my husband is Scotch, and that we have many connections about the country. The story is no novelty to me.'

Lady Thompson could bear her dreadful position no longer. She stumbled from her seat, a mass of hot furs, and thrust her teacup into Mr. Sitwell's hand. 'Then how was it that Miss Dolly was nearly making a friend of 'er?' she cried. 'Oh, let me get away from the fire—there's a dear!'

This cry of anguish took something from the force of the strong point which the homely lady had made. A little bustle ensued, and general changing of places, in the midst of which Mrs. Jenkinson came in, full of the important contribution which her husband had made to the evidence on the subject. But she found the conclave breaking up, and had no opportunity of putting forth her testimony. It was still discussed in corners. Mrs. Sitwell, quite pale, and very eager and demonstrative, stood under her husband's shadow, who looked exceedingly severe and grave, making explanations to two ladies aside; and Lady Thompson had been led into the conservatory to recover, where she had been joined by Miss Marsham. These two poor women were in a great state of emotion and excitement. It was not tears, indeed, which the soap-boiler's wife was wiping from her crimson forehead. Yet she was all but crying, too.

'I took a fancy to 'er the first day. If she ain't a lady, Miss Marsham, dear, I don't know when I 'ave seen one,' Lady Thompson said.

'Oh, poor dear! poor dear! If she has made a sacrifice for the sake of her people, who could blame her?' the other gentle creature cried, with sniffs and sobs. They were the helpless ones who could not affect society—even the suburban society which was led by Lady St. Clair.

Lady Thompson had loosed her great cloak: the coolness of the conservatory gave her courage. 'How can we help 'er?' she said. 'Me and Sir Sam would do anything. And I don't believe,—not one word. Not one word!' she repeated with emphasis—'as them cats says.' She was vulgar, it could not be denied, but her heart was in the right place.

Miss Marsham, poor lady, was not vulgar at all. She could not refuse to believe what was told her, being incapable of understanding how anybody could, as she said, 'Look her in the face' and tell a lie—a characteristic which the school children and the people in her district knew and worked pitilessly. 'Oh, poor dear! poor dear!' she said, 'I for one would never, never blame her. There is nothing in the world so natural as to sacrifice yourself, if it's to do anybody any good. I understand her,' said the good

woman. 'I am sure there's been nothing wrong in it. But, oh, I don't know in the least what to do.'

Lady St. Clair, however, was talking of other things among her guests, who had begun to disperse, and there was no opportunity for Mrs. Jenkinson. This roused that lady to a wholesome sense of opposition, and a growing determination to interfere.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE storm subsided which had raged around Joyce for that long and miserable day. When a few others had passed in their usual calm, the Colonel, who had elaborately refrained from all allusion to what had occurred, saying even from time to time, 'We must not speak of that,' made up his mind with great satisfaction that Joyce had dismissed it from her mind. 'She is so full of sense,' he said to his wife; 'she doesn't go fretting and worrying about a thing as I do. When she knows that there is nothing to be done, she just puts it aside. I wish we were all as sensible as Joyce.'

'Then take care you don't remind her of it,' said Mrs. Hayward.

'I—remind her! Why, I have said from the first—We'll say nothing of that. Time will settle it. I have said it every day. And you think I would remind her!'

'Well, Henry, I would not say even that if I were you. I have given Baker his orders never to let that man in again. I hate to take servants into my confidence, but still—— Fortunately nobody has seen him or knows anything about him,' said the deceived woman, with mistaken calm. She was not so sure about Joyce's good sense as her husband was; but even in the midst of her annoyance a certain compassion for Joyce had awakened in her mind. Poor thing! to feel herself bound to such a man. 'And we are not done with him,' Mrs. Hayward said to herself. She sighed for the calm of those days when there were no complications—when it was quite unnecessary to give Baker any instructions as to who should be admitted—when a disturbance and angry controversy in her pretty drawing-room would have been a thing inconceivable. She thought she could decipher a trace of Andrew's country boots on the Persian rug, a delightful specimen upon which (she had remarked at the time) he had placed his chair. The Colonel in his anger had crushed up between his hands a piece of fine embroidery, and unravelled out some of the gold thread which

formed the exquisite pattern. In spite of these things Mrs. Hayward, for the first time, was sorry for Joyce. She felt with an impatient vexation that if Captain Bellendean had but 'spoken' when she thought he did, all this might have been avoided. There would no doubt still have been a struggle. The schoolmaster would not have given in without a fight; but Mrs. Hayward knew human nature well enough to be sure that with a man behind her whom she loved, Joyce would have felt her bond to the man whom she did not love to be still more impossible. In such a case fidelity was no longer a virtue but a crime.

But Bellendean had gone, and had not spoken. Mrs. Hayward had been both angry and disappointed by this failure. She had blamed Joyce for it, and she had blamed the Colonel for it. That a man should *afficher* himself and then go away was a thing not to be endured, according to her ideas. And now she was really sorry for Joyce, in both these aspects of her case. If Joyce had but known how much her stepmother divined, all her troubles would have been increased tenfold. But fortunately she did not know, although the additional kindness of Mrs. Hayward's manner gave her now and then a thrill of fear.

She was walking with her father in the park one morning, not long after these events. Winter was coming on with great strides, and the leaves fell in showers before every breath of wind. Some of the trees were already bare. Some stood up all golden yellow against the background of bare boughs, lighting up the landscape. The grass was all particoloured with the sprinklings of the fallen leaves. Under the hill the river flowed down the valley, coming out of distances unseen. The Colonel and his daughter paused at a favourite point of theirs to look at the prospect. The wide vault of firmament above and the great breadth of air and space beyond were always a refreshment and consolation. 'O Thames! flow softly while I sing my song,' Joyce said, under her breath.

'Eh?—what were you saying, Joyce?'

'Nothing,' she said, with a smile; 'only a line out of a poem.'

'Ah! you know so much more about books, my dear, than I have ever done. You must get that turn in your education early, or you never take it of yourself. I have never asked you, Joyce, though it has often been on the tip of my tongue. How do you like the place, now you know it? I hope you like your home.'

'It is very—bonnie. I use that word,' said Joyce, 'because it means the most. Pretty would be impertinent to the Thames—and beautiful——'

'Do you think beautiful's too much? 'Well, my dear, tastes

differ ; but I never saw anything that pleased me like the course of the river and the splendid trees. You should have lived in a hot climate to appreciate fully English trees.'

'Oh, but I do,' cried Joyce. 'They are finer than we have—in Scotland,' she said, after a pause. It had been on her lips to say 'at home.'

'Much finer,' said the Colonel, with conviction ; 'but that is not exactly an answer to my question. I asked if you liked it—as your home.'

Joyce raised her eyes to him, moist and shining. 'Father,' she said, 'it is you who are my home.'

'My love !' the Colonel stammered and faltered, in unexpected emotion. The water came to his eyes and blotted out the landscape. 'You make me very happy and very proud, Joyce. This is more, much more than I had any right to.' He took her hand in his and drew it within his arm. 'I have wanted,' he said, 'to surround you with everything that your poor mother did not have—to make you happy if I could, my dear : but I scarcely expected such a return as this. God bless you, Joyce ! Still,' said the pertinacious inquirer, caressing the hand upon his arm, 'that's not quite what I asked, my dear.'

Joyce had twice avoided the direct response he demanded. She paused before she replied. 'Some,' she said, 'father, are happy enough never to need to think, or ask such a question. I wish I had been always where you were, and never to have had any life but yours ; or else——' Colonel Hayward fortunately did not remark these two syllables, which were softly said, and breathed off into a sigh.

'My dear,' he said, 'under the best of circumstances that could never have been, for you know the most of my life has been spent in India. The worst of India is, that parents must part with their children. We should not really have known very much more of each other if—if you had been born, as you should have been, in your father's house.'

'Then there is little harm done,' said Joyce, this time with a smile.

'Not if you trust us fully, my dear, and love your home.' He patted her hand again, then moved on unsatisfied. 'I think, however, you are beginning to like the people, and feel at home among them. And they like you. I am sure they like you—and admire you, Joyce, and feel that you are—— There is Lady St. Clair ; my dear, with all her bevy of girls. You will want to stop and speak to them. My wife says they're the best people, but I'm not

myself very fond—— How do you do?' cried the Colonel cheerily, taking off his hat with a flourish. 'Lovely morning! How do you do?'

The old soldier stood the image of good-humour and cheerful courtesy, holding his hat in his hand. There were so many ladies to share his bow that it was longer than usual, and gave the wind time to blow about a little the close curly locks, touched with gray, which covered the Colonel's head with all the vigour of youth. His countenance beamed with kindness and that civility of the heart which made the fact that he was not himself very fond of this group inoperative. But when Lady St. Clair, picking her steps to the other side of the road, delivered in return the most chilling of faint bows, while her daughters hurried like a flock of birds across the park to avoid the encounter, Colonel Hayward stood dumb with consternation in the middle of the path. His under lip dropped in his astonishment, he forgot to put on his hat. He turned to Joyce, holding it in his hand, with dismay in his face. 'What—what,' he cried, 'is the meaning of that?'

'Indeed I don't know,' said Joyce. She was not aroused to the importance of the action. Unfortunately she did not care, nor did it seem to her that so slight a matter was worth noticing. 'They were perhaps in a hurry,' she said.

'In a hurry! They meant to avoid us. They would rather not have seen us. What does it mean, Joyce? They consulted together, and the girls rushed off, and their mother—I am utterly astounded, Joyce.'

'But,' said Joyce, very calmly, 'if they did not wish to speak to us, why should they? I do not think I care.'

The Colonel put on his hat. He had grown a little pale. 'Elizabeth will not like it,' he said. 'She will not like it at all. For a long time she would not go into society, because of—— But now that she does she likes to know all the best people. I am not myself fond of those St. Clairs. But any unpleasantness, I am sure, would make her unhappy. Can I have done anything, I wonder? I am a blundering old fellow,—I may have neglected some etiquette——'

'Perhaps it would be better to say nothing about it,' said Joyce.

'Much better!' cried the Colonel. 'That's the right way—take no notice. I am glad you are of that opinion. But I'm very bad at keeping a secret, Joyce. Probably I'll blurt it out.'

'No, father. I will look at you when I see you approaching the subject,' said Joyce. She was quite unconscious of any seriousness in the matter. Lady St. Clair and her girls seemed in-

capable of any influence on her fate. She even laughed, looking up at him with a lightness quite unusual to her. 'It will be a little secret between us,' she said.

'So it will,' said the Colonel, brightening; 'but you must keep your eyes upon me, Joyce. I never could keep a thing to myself in my life, particularly from Elizabeth. But this cannot be of any importance after all, can it? No, I don't think it can be of any importance. Lady St. Clair may be vexed with me perhaps for the moment. I may have done some silly thing or other. I would not for the world have a secret from Elizabeth—but such a trifle as this.'

'It cannot be of the least importance,' said Joyce. She was more confident of being right than he had ever known her before.

'Well, my dear: but you must keep your eyes upon me,' Colonel Hayward said.

He came back to the subject several times as they went on, and worked out the shock, so that by the time they reached home, he himself had come to regard Lady St. Clair's incivility as a matter of little importance. 'Perhaps she had something on her mind, my dear; their eldest boy, I believe, gives them a great deal of trouble. And I know they are not rich—and with that large family. People are not always in the mood for a conversation on the roadside. You are quite right, Joyce. I daresay it meant just nothing at all but the humour of the moment. It will be a little secret between you and me—but you must keep your eyes upon me. Give a little cough, or put your hand up to your brooch, or some sign I shall know—for I am an old goose, I know it: I can keep nothing to myself.'

When they reached home, however, the incident and the secret were both forgotten in the surprise which awaited them. They found Mrs. Hayward in the drawing-room entertaining Mrs. Bellendean. Joyce, though she had always been more shy of her dear lady since she had discovered how much Mrs. Bellendean's behaviour to herself was influenced by her change of circumstances, was startled out of all her preventions by this unexpected visit. But the sight of the woman to whom she had looked up with such sincere reverence, and admired before everybody in the world, was not now to her so simple a matter as it had once been: after the first burst of pleasure it was impossible to forget how closely associated she was both with the old life and the new. And Mrs. Bellendean herself was changed. There were lines of anxiety and care in her face. She was no longer the calm queen in her own circle, the centre of pleasure and promotion she had once appeared

to Joyce. The peace of the old life was gone from her, and something of its largeness and dignity. She talked of her present plans and purposes in such a way that Joyce, though little accustomed to the subtleties of conventional life, slowly came to perceive that the object of Mrs. Bellendean's visit was not that which it professed to be. She explained to them that she was about to leave England with her husband for Italy, and that she had come to take leave of her friends—but this was not all. Joyce's training in the net-work of motives which lie under the surface was very imperfect. She wondered, without at all divining, what the other object was.

'Things have changed very much since Bellendean ceased to be our headquarters,' she said with a smile which was not a very cheerful one. 'You remember how much I threw myself into it, Joyce. After having nothing particular to do, to come into that full life with so many things to look after was delightful to me. But my husband never liked it,' she added quickly. 'He dislikes the worry and the responsibility. He thinks it worry: you know I never did.'

'My friend Norman,' said the Colonel, 'will be lost without you. It must have been such a thing for him.'

'Oh, Norman has been very good.' Lines came out on Mrs. Bellendean's brow which had not been there before. 'You saw something of him during the summer?'

'Something—oh, a great deal! We got quite used to see him appearing in his flannels. Fine exercise for a young fellow: It helped him to support London,' said the guileless Colonel. 'I think he found us very handy here.'

'Old fellows, I suspect, think more of exercise than young fellows,' said Mrs. Hayward; 'and London is very supportable in Captain Bellendean's circumstances—but we did see a little of him from time to time.'

Joyce said nothing at all. She kept a little behind, away from Mrs. Bellendean's anxious eyes. She could not prevent the colour from deepening in her face, or her heart from beating high and loud in her breast—so loud that she felt it must be heard by others as well as herself, the most distinct sound in the room.

'He has not been here very lately, I suppose?' Mrs. Bellendean said.

'Oh no, not since August—when he came to bid us good-bye.'

'As I am doing now,' said Mrs. Bellendean. She could not see Joyce, who was behind her, but she was noting, with the intensest observation, every movement and word. She was on a voyage of

discovery, not quite knowing what she expected, almost too eager to distinguish what she imagined from what she saw.

'Shooting, I suppose,' said the Colonel. 'I hope he has had good sport. There was some talk of his coming back, but I never expected him for my part, until the moors began to pall; and that doesn't happen soon, your first year at home. You preserved, of course, at Bellendean.'

'There are always plenty of partridges—nothing more exciting. He has been up in the Highlands, coming and going. I think he has thoroughly enjoyed himself—as you say, the first year at home.'

These words were all very simple and natural; but there was a little emphasis here and there, which betrayed a meaning more than met the ear. Joyce felt them fall upon her heart like so many stones, thrown singly, resolutely, with intention. It had never occurred to her before that any one could wish to give her pain: and that her own lady should do it—her model of all that was greatest and sweetest! The cruel boys throw stones at wounded, helpless things. She remembered suddenly, with that quickness of imagination which enhances every impression, a scene which detached itself from the past—a boy in the village aiming steadily at a lame dog, and how she had flung herself upon him in a blaze of indignation, to his supreme astonishment. Why this should come into her head she could not tell. The dog could yelp at least, but Joyce could not cry out. It seemed to her that it was Mrs. Bellendean, in her mature, middle-aged beauty, tall, dignified, and serene, who stood and took aim. It was all new to Joyce—the covert blow, the deliberate intention, the strong necessity of keeping still, uttering no sound, giving no look even of consciousness. Nothing in her past experience had prepared her for this.

'I have more sympathy with your plans than with Captain Bellendean's amusements,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'Sport's monotonous, at least to women who only look on. But to get away for the winter is always delightful. Oh, not to you, Henry, I know! You like your walks. And he tells me it is so English, so like home. Very English indeed, and pleasant, for girls who skate, and all that; but when one begins to get old and go about in a shawl!'

'I would willingly compound for the shawl,' said the visitor. 'It is cold enough at Bellendean; but there one had both duties and pleasures. I hate to be one of a useless crowd, drifting about pleasure-places. When it's health it is dismal enough; but at least there is some meaning in that.'

‘Oh, there is a great deal of meaning in being warm,’ cried Mrs. Hayward, with a little shiver, ‘in seeing sunshine and the blue sky instead of universal greyness and fogs. The Colonel takes a pleasure in it, even in east wind ; but so do not I.’

‘My dear,’ cried Colonel Hayward anxiously, ‘if you really do feel so strongly about it, you don’t think that I would ever object ? I like my own country, I confess ; and to understand what everybody’s saying—but if you feel the cold so much——’

It was not much wonder that he should not understand ; but Joyce, for whom the thing was done, knew almost as little as he did that this diversion was for her benefit. A half-forlorn wonder arose in her mind that so much useless, aimless talk should mingle with the torture through which she was going. Better that the stones should all be thrown, and the victim left in peace. But this was not how it was to be. The gong sounded, beaten by Baker’s powerful hand, and the little procession went in to luncheon. Joyce had to expose her face, with all its clouds, the burning red which she felt on her cheek, the heavy shadow about her eyes, to the full daylight and Mrs. Bellendean’s searching gaze. Nobody could help her now.

CHAPTER XXXIX

‘At last I can get a word with yourself, Joyce!’

Mrs. Bellendean led her out under the verandah to the garden path beyond with an anxiety and eagerness which startled Joyce. She half enveloped the girl in the warmth of her cloak and of the caressing arm which held hers. It was a caressing hold, but very firm, not leaving any possibility of escape. More than an hour had passed slowly in the usual vague interchanges of drawing-room conversation, when there is nothing particular to talk about on either side; but the visitor had said nothing about going—had not even mentioned, as such visitors are bound to do, the train by which she intended to leave. She had kept a furtive watch upon Joyce, following all her movements, but she had not transgressed against decorum and domestic rule by asking to speak with her alone. Accident, however, had done what Mrs. Bellendean did not venture to do. Mrs. Hayward had been called away for some domestic consultation, the Colonel had gone out, and Joyce was left with her visitor alone.

‘Are you afraid of the cold?—but it isn’t cold—and I do want to say a dozen words where no one can possibly hear. Joyce, my dear girl, do let me speak to you while there is time. Joyce—I don’t know how to open the subject—I would not venture if I were less anxious. Joyce, you heard what I was saying about Norman, my stepson?’

‘Yes.’ Joyce did not look up, nor did she feel herself able to say more.

‘You used to be—devoted to me, Joyce; as I always was very fond of you. A little cloud has come between us somehow—I can’t tell how—but it has made no difference to my feelings.’ Mrs. Bellendean was a little short of breath. She paused, pressing Joyce’s arm with hers, leaning over her, with anxious eyes upon her face. But something prevented Joyce from making any

response — that cloud was still between them, whatever it was.

‘You know very well the interest I have always taken in you from the very beginning, before any one suspected—— And Greta—Greta was always fond of you. You have not met much lately.’

‘No.’ Nothing would come but monosyllables.

‘I want to speak to you of Greta, Joyce. She is younger than you are, though you are young enough. She has never been crossed or disappointed in her life. I can’t think of *that* for her without a shudder. She would die. It would break her heart.’

‘What?’ said Joyce.

‘Joyce, I am going to take you into our confidence—to tell you our secret; you will never betray us. If things should happen so that what we wish never came to pass, you would not betray us?’

For the first time Joyce raised her eyes to Mrs. Bellendean’s face.

‘I know—I know—I never doubted for a moment. It will rest with you to decide. Joyce, you have got Greta’s life in your hands.’

‘I! in my hands.’ She looked up again into the face which was bending so closely with such an anxious look over hers. The lace of Mrs. Bellendean’s veil swept her forehead. The breath, which came so quick, breathed upon her cheek.

‘Joyce,’ said the lady again, ‘I know that it was not a little that you saw Norman. I know that he was here day after day. I know that he was—in love with you.’

Joyce detached herself suddenly from that close enlacement. She drew her arm away, shook off the draperies which half enveloped her. ‘I do not think you have any right—to say that to me,’ she said.

‘If I did not know it to be true—and you know it’s true. He came here day after day till he imagined—he was in love with you. And then he came to Bellendean. All this time he has been seeing Greta every day. He has made her believe that it is she whom he loves.’

The heart of Joyce gave one bound as if it would have burst out of her breast.

‘And she believes it,’ said Mrs. Bellendean. ‘She is a tender little flower; she has never been crossed in her life. She believes that it is she whom he loves—and she loves him.’

There was a momentary silence, complete and terrible. A little

gust of wind burst forth suddenly, and sent a small shower of leaves at their feet. They both started, as if these had been the footsteps of some intruder.

'It has always been our desire : '—the visitor began again in a low voice, as if she were afraid of being overheard—'everybody has wished and expected it. They suit each other in every way. She has been brought up for him. She has always thought of Norman all her life. Poor little Greta ! she is so young—not strong either ; her mother died quite young. And she doesn't know what disappointment is. We are all to blame ; we have petted her and made her think there was nothing but happiness before her. And she was always fond of you, Joyce. You, too'—Mrs. Bellendean added, after a pause—'you were devoted to her.'

Joyce's voice sounded harsh and hoarse. After the silence it came out quite suddenly, all the music and softness gone out of it : 'What have I to do with all this ? What has it to say to me ?'

'Joyce ! do you think I would come to you without strong reason—betraying Greta ?'

'This has nothing to do with me,' said Joyce again.

'It has everything to do with you. So long as he has been at home all has been well. He has seen her every day. He has got to appreciate her, and to see that she is the right wife for him, his own class, his own kind, fit to take her place in the county, and help him to his right position. But he is coming up to town. He will be coming here,' said Mrs. Bellendean, putting her hand again upon the girl's arm. 'Oh, Joyce, Joyce——'

'I have nothing to do with it,' said Joyce. 'What—what do you think I can do ?'

'He—can be nothing to you,' said the visitor tremulously. 'You—you're engaged already. You've given your word to a—good respectable man. Norman is only a stranger to you.'

Joyce did not reply. She drew herself away a little, but could not escape the pressure of that eager, persuasive hand.

'I understand it all,' said Mrs. Bellendean. 'He is not clever, but he has the manners of a man that knows the world, and he has been very much struck with you. And you have been—flattered. You have liked to have him come, even though he could never be anything to you.'

She had got Joyce's arm again in her close clasp, and she felt the strong pulsations, the resistance, the movements of agitation, which, with all her power of self-control, the girl could not restrain.

‘Oh, think, Joyce, before it goes any further! Will you for simple vanity—or like one of the flirts that would have every one at their feet—will you break Greta’s heart, and make a desert of both their lives? All for what?—for a brag,—for a little pleasure to your pride,—for it can be nothing else, seeing you’re engaged to another man!’

The woman was cruel, remorseless,—for she felt Joyce’s arm vibrate in her clasp, which she could not loosen,—and thus commanded her secrets, and forced her to betray herself. The girl felt herself driven to bay.

‘I don’t understand—the things you say,’ she answered slowly at last. ‘You speak as if I had a power—a power—that I know nothing about. And oh, you’re cruel, cruel! to put all that in my mind. What—do you think I can do?’

‘Oh, Joyce, I knew you would never fail me. You have such a generous heart. Let him see, only let him see, that between him and you there can be nothing. He will accept it quickly enough. A man’s pride is soon up in arms. It has only been a passing fancy, and he will soon see that everything is against it; while everything is in favour of the other. If you will only be firm, and let him see—oh, Joyce, you who are so clever! dear Joyce!’

Joyce’s heart swelled almost to bursting. ‘You call me clever, and dear,’ she cried; ‘and you tell me I must save Greta’s heart from breaking; but what if I were to break mine,—and what if I were to hurt his,—and what if I were to make three miserable instead of one? You never think of that.’

‘No,’ cried Mrs. Bellendean, with a tone of indignation; ‘because I would never do you that wrong, Joyce,—you that are honour itself and the soul of truth,—to believe that you had even a thought of Norman, being engaged to another man.’

Joyce shrank as if she had received a blow. ‘Oh,’ she cried, in a broken voice, ‘you never ceased to say that I had done wrong—that it was not a fit thing for me—that I would change, that I would find it not possible to keep my word. You said so—not I.’

‘My dear! my dear!’ cried Mrs. Bellendean.

‘No,’ said Joyce, ‘don’t call me so. I am not dear any more. You know that there was a time when Joyce would do what you said, if it was small or great, if it was to give you a flower or to give you her heart; and then you changed, and that ceased to be; and we got all wrong because I was Colonel Hayward’s daughter. And now you come and put me back again in my old place, but

far, far lower—the girl engaged to Andrew Halliday, whom you never could bear to hear of—and bid me do what may be, perhaps, for all you know, a heartbreak to me——’

‘No, Joyce—no, dear Joyce!’

‘For what?’ she said sadly—‘that you may call me *that*—you that raised me up to your arms, for being not myself but my father’s daughter—and now drop me down, down again, for fear I should come in your way. And why should I break my heart more than Greta? why should I be disappointed and not she? why should I give up my hope to save her—if it was so?’

‘But, Joyce, Joyce!—it is not so!’

Joyce made no reply.

The two figures moved on together slowly in silence, with the autumn leaves dropping over them, and the afternoon growing grey. Mrs. Bellendean felt upon her arm the strong beating of the girl’s heart, and the tremor that went through her; and her own heart smote her for what she was doing: but not for so little as that did she give up the work which was already more than half done. She followed all the movements of the girl’s mind with an extraordinary sympathy, even while she set herself to the task of overcoming them; for she was not the less fond of Joyce, and scarcely felt with her less, for this determination to subdue her. She was conscious of the commotion, the revolt, the sense of personal wrong, yet underneath all the strong fidelity and loyalty of the spirit over which she was exercising a tyrannical power. She let her own influence work in the silence, without saying a word, with an assurance of victory. The only thing that lessened the cruelty of the undertaking was that she did not really know whether Joyce’s heart was or was not engaged—even now she could not fathom that—but was able to persuade herself that the girl’s protest was one of indignation only, not of outraged love; and that the sacrifice, if she made it, would only be a sacrifice of her pleasure in a conquest and of her vanity, not of any real happiness or hope.

Mrs. Bellendean’s confidence was justified. After a minute or two, which had seemed hours, Joyce spoke again. ‘There is no need to tell you,’ she said, very low, so that the lady had to stoop to hear her—for Joyce’s head was bent, and her voice scarcely audible—‘there is no need to tell you—that as far as in me lies I will do what you say.’

‘My dearest, kind girl—my own Joyce!’

‘No,’ she said, with a shudder, drawing away her arm, ‘not that—never that. It is all changed and different, Mrs. Bellen-

dean. I am not even Joyce, your schoolmistress, that was so proud to please you ; but in another parish, with another name—as you think best for me.'

'Oh, Joyce,' said Mrs. Bellendean, with real pain, 'don't say that ! I only think so because you yourself thought so ; and with your father's help and that of your friends, it need not be another parish, nor any parish. He is a most respectable, clever man. We will find him something far better, something more worthy of *you*.'

Joyce said nothing more. She turned round and led the way back to the house, keeping apart from her companion, walking with a new-born dignity and pride. There was not another word said as they returned to the verandah, from which Mrs. Hayward was looking out, looking for them. She had a shawl wrapped close round her, yet shivered a little in the early falling twilight. 'You will both get your death of cold,' she cried. 'Come in, come in, and have some tea. Joyce, you really carry rashness too far : you must be chilled to death.'

'I am afraid it is my fault,' said Mrs. Bellendean. 'I forgot she had no wrap. It was such a pleasure to have a little talk with her'—the lady hesitated for a moment, then added with a tremble in her voice—'as in the old days.'

As in the old days !—a pleasure to talk ! 'Yes, it is very cold,' said Joyce, holding her hands to the fire. She stood up there, a dark shadow against the warm glow. A strange fascination kept her in the presence of the woman whom she had so loved, who had turned her love to such account. She stood there without moving, trembling with the cold, and something more than the cold. So long as these entreaties were not repeated here ! so long as her step-mother was not taken into the lady's confidence too. Nothing was further from Mrs. Bellendean's mind. She took with pleasure the warm cup of tea, which, and the warm air of the fire-lighted room, brought back a genial heat all over her. She was a little tremulous, yet satisfied, feeling that she had done all for which she had come. And no harm had been done to Joyce—no harm. She wished the girl would not stand there, cold, reproaching her by the silent shiver with which she held her hands to the fire. But that was all. What is a little cold at her age ?—no more than the little puncture of her vanity, the little salutary wound which was all, Mrs. Bellendean persuaded herself, that she had given.

'It was foolish of me to forget that Joyce had no shawl. She has always been so hardy, I hope it will not matter. It is such a

long time since I have seen her.' It seemed impossible to change the subject, to get out of these *banalités* which meant so much worse than nothing, which conveyed so false a sense to Joyce's keen ear. Mrs. Bellendean was embarrassed, but she was not conscious of being false. She added, 'And it will be a long time before we meet again. I shall have to try and dismiss all my anxieties about my friends from my mind. Joyce is one whom I can always trust not to misunderstand me, not to forget anything,' Mrs. Bellendean said.

Joyce heard everything, even the rustle of Mrs. Bellendean's gown, the movement of her arm as she lifted her teacup to her lips, but could not move or say a word. She stood still, warming herself, while the two ladies carried out the usual little interchange of nothings. All they said entered into her brain, and remained in her memory like something of importance. But it was of no importance. Presently Mrs. Bellendean remembered that she must go by a certain train, and a cab had to be sent for. There was a little bustle of leave-taking. Joyce felt herself enclosed in a warm embrace, tenderly kissed, still more tenderly said farewell to. 'I don't say, Remember, for I am sure you will not forget me, Joyce,' were Mrs. Bellendean's last words, 'nor what I have said.' But to this also Joyce replied nothing.

'I thought she was never going away,' said Mrs. Hayward. 'She must have had something very particular to say to you, Joyce.'

Joyce was walking across the hall towards the stair without any response. Mrs. Hayward stood still under the light and cried impatiently, 'You don't seem to have heard me. You look dazed. What had she to say to you, Joyce?'

Joyce turned half round, holding by the banister of the stair. She said, 'Nothing—it was I myself——' then paused. 'She was telling me about Greta. Greta—has never been disappointed—not like—like other folk.'

'Never disappointed!' cried Mrs. Hayward. 'Do they think she can get through life like that? And was this all Mrs. Bellendean came to say? I think she might have saved herself the trouble. I would let Miss Greta look after her own affairs.'

CHAPTER XL

NEVER had been disappointed—never crossed !

Perhaps that is as real a claim upon human compassion as is the claim of the long-suffering and much-tried. Perhaps it is even a stronger claim. It is the claim of a child. Who would be the one to open the doors of human trouble to a child?—to give the first blow?—to begin the disenchantment which is the rule of life? People get used to disappointments as to the other burdens of human existence; but to snatch the first light away and replace it by darkness, who would do that willingly? to change the firmament and eclipse the sunshine, where all had been brightness and hope! There had been a sombre anger roused in Joyce's heart by that appeal. She had said, Why should one be spared by the pain of another? Why should her heart break, that Greta's should be saved from aching? But she no longer asked herself that question. She said to herself that it was just. There are some that must be saved while the others go bleeding. It is the rule of life—not justice, perhaps, but something that is above justice. Some must have flowers strewn upon their path, while others walk across the burning ploughshares. There was no reason in it, perhaps, no logic, but only truth: for some object unknown, which God had made a law of life. Greta had been the idol of her family all her life. Everybody had loved her, and cared for her. She had been sheltered from every wind that blew. Joyce was only a little older, but already had passed through so many experiences. *She* knew what it was to be disappointed, to have all her dreams cut short, and the current of her being changed. Another pang to her, who was accustomed to it, would not be half so much as the first pang of wounding misery to Greta. Poor little Greta! fed on the roses, and laid in the lilies of life, to give her all at once the apples of Gomorrah, to wrap her in the poisoned robe. Oh no! oh no! It was a just plea. Let the

heart that is used to it go on breaking; let the child's heart go free.

Joyce's room was the one full of thoughts in the middle of that peaceful house. In all the others was the regular breathing of quiet sleepers—the rest of the undisturbed. She alone waked, with her little light burning, throwing a faint gleam across the invisible river-banks, on the dark stream floating unseen. Had there been any wayfarer belated, any boat floating down-stream, the gleam from that window would have given cheer in the middle of the darkness and night. But there was not much cheer in it. The room it lighted was full of thoughts and cares, and sheltered a human creature facing a sea of troubles, doing her best to keep afloat—sometimes almost submerged by these rising waves: and there is this additional pang in the troubles of a woman—of a girl like Joyce—that there is no motive to strive against them. The Hamlets of existence have a great life and great possibilities before them; but what profit is there to the world in one poor girl the more or less? If she is glad or sad—a victim or a conqueror—what matter? Her poor old people were separated from her. They would never know. Her father would not suffer, and no one else in the world would care. There was no mother, no sister, to wish her woes their own—not even a friend—not a friend! for Mrs. Bellendean and Greta were those who had been most dear. There would be some use in her suffering, but none in her happiness—none at all: rather evil to all concerned. A selfish good purchased by others' disadvantage. No good—no good to any one in the world.

Joyce said to herself, in her profound discouragement, that after all Mrs. Bellendean's prayer had made no change in anything. She had already made up her mind. Happiness was a very doubtful thing in any case, everybody said. It was not the end of existence, it was a chimera that flew from you the more you sought it. But your honour was your life. To be faithful and true, to be worthy of trust, to stand to your word whatever happened, that was the best thing in the world, the only thing worth living and dying for. Even if you could not keep your word to the letter, she said to herself with a shudder, at least to do nothing against it, not to contradict it before earth and heaven! No human creature but can do that. She would never, never turn her back upon her pledge. What was the need of invoking another motive, of adjuring her by Greta's happiness, by Norman's advantage? This was only to irritate, to import into the question a sense of injustice and wrong. It had been decided before there was a word of

all that. Everything that Mrs. Bellendean had said had been an irritation to Joyce. To take it for granted that her happiness should yield to that of Greta,—that Norman's interests should be considered before hers,—that she would be a burden, a disadvantage to Norman, while Greta would be nothing but good and happiness:—and finally to thrust her back to what they considered her own place, into the arms of the man whom they all had thought unworthy of Joyce in Joyce's humblest days,—to thrust her back into his arms, to speak of promotion for him, of humble advancement, comfort which would make him a match for her!

Mrs. Bellendean's appeal had only brought a succession of irritations, one more keen than the other. Joyce felt herself angered, wounded, driven to bay. She had not needed any inducement to do what she felt to be right; but now it required an effort to return to the state in which she had been when she had renewed her pledge and promised to keep to her word. She would stand by that resolution whatever might be said; but she was angry, offended, wounded, in her deepest heart. Her friends, her own friends, those who were most dear, had torn away all veils from the helpless and shrinking soul. She had been Joyce, their handmaiden—oh, eager to do their will; ready to spend her life for them, in proud yet perfect humility. And then they had lifted her up, called her their equal, pretended to treat her as such, because of the change—though there was no change in her. And yet again, last phase of all, they had flung her down from that fictitious position, and shown her that to them in truth she never had been more than a handmaiden, a being without rights or feelings, born only to yield to them. And these were her dearest friends, the friends of her whole life, whose affection had elevated her above herself! Joyce hid her face, that she might not see the thoughts that rent her heart. Her friends, her familiar friends, in whom she had trusted; her dear lady, who had been to her like the saints in heaven; her Greta, whom she had thought like an angel. They had betrayed her, and after this, what did it matter what man or woman could do?

The night was half over before the little light in the window disappeared from the darkling world through which the Thames flowed unseen. It disappeared, and all was black and invisible, the dark sky and the darker earth lost in the night and the blackness of the night and its silence. No such watch had ever been kept in that peaceful house before.

Next morning, when Joyce came downstairs, looking very pale

and sleepless, with dark lines under her eyes, she found her step-mother standing in the hall, turning over a letter, with great surprise in her face. 'It is inconceivable,' she was saying.

'It must be a mistake,' said the Colonel; 'depend upon it, it must be a mistake.'

'To ask you and me and not Joyce,—I cannot understand it. Can Joyce have done anything to offend them? Why should I be asked to a ball but for Joyce? We are not dancing people, you and I. I might have gone for Joyce, and Joyce is left out. What can it mean? She must have done something to offend them.'

'That reminds me, my dear,' said the Colonel, 'of something that happened yesterday. We met the St. Clairs, that huge regiment. I took off my hat—oh!' said the Colonel suddenly, beholding Joyce with her finger up, standing behind Mrs. Hayward.

'What do you mean by breaking off like this? What happened?' cried his wife.

'Oh, nothing, nothing, my dear,' said the veteran, with confusion and dismay.

'Nothing, Henry? you change your tone very quickly. You spoke as if it had some bearing upon this strange invitation, which wants explanation very much.'

'No, my dear, no. I was mistaken; it couldn't have anything to do with that. In short, it was nothing—nothing—only a piece of nonsense—one of my mistakes.' He looked piteously at Joyce, standing behind, who had dropped her hand, as if abandoning the warning which she had given him. Joyce, in the extremity of her trouble, had fallen into that quiescence which comes with the failure of hope. She remembered the bargain that had been made between them at the instant, but that and everything else seemed of too little importance now to move her beyond a moment. Mrs. Hayward, however, turned round, following her husband's look.

'Oh, it is you, Joyce! You wish your father not to tell me.'

'The fact is,' said the Colonel, eager to speak, 'we thought it might annoy you, Elizabeth.'

'You are taking the best way to annoy me,' she cried. 'What is this you have been making up between you? Henry, I have a right at least to the truth from you.'

'The truth!' he said; 'surely, my dear, the truth, if it was of any consequence. Joyce will tell you what happened. It was of no importance. Most likely Lady St. Clair is short-sighted.'

Many ladies are, you know. Most likely she didn't make out who we were. That was your opinion, Joyce, wasn't it?' The Colonel felt that the best thing he could do, as Joyce did not help him out in safety, was to drag her into her share of the danger.

'There might be many reasons. I did not think it mattered at all,' said Joyce.

'Reasons for what?' said Mrs. Hayward, stamping her foot on the ground. 'I think between you you will drive me mad.'

'My dear! for nothing at all, Elizabeth. She scarcely returned my salutation. The girls all scuttled off across the park like so many rabbits. They are not unlike rabbits,' the Colonel said, with an ingratiating smile. 'But we agreed it was of no importance, and that it was useless to speak to you of it, as it might annoy you: we agreed——'

'You agreed!' Mrs. Hayward gave Joyce an angry look. 'I wish in such matters, Henry, you would act from your own impulse, and never mind any one else.' She swept in before the others into the dining-room, where it was the wont of the household that the Colonel every morning should read prayers. But it is to be feared that these prayers were not so composing to the soul of the mistress of the house as might have been wished. 'We agreed'—these words kept ringing through the devotions of the family, as if some sprite of mischief had thrown them, a sort of demoniac squib or cracker through the quiet air. To have her husband consult with his daughter as to what should or should not be told to her was more than she could bear.

Mrs. Hayward went out in the afternoon alone to make a call at a much frequented house, where she hoped to discover what was the cause of Lady St. Clair's rudeness and Mrs. Morton's strange invitation. She met a great many acquaintances, as was natural in a small place, where all 'the best people' knew each other. Among them was Lady St. Clair, who, instead of avoiding her as she had done the Colonel, came forward with *empressment*, showing the most sympathetic civility. 'How are you, dear Mrs. Hayward? I hope you are well. I do hope you are bearing—the beginning of the severe weather,' that lady said, shaking her hand warmly, and looking with tender meaning in her eyes.

'I don't pay much attention to the weather, thank you,' said Mrs. Hayward, 'and we can't complain of it so far. I am glad to see *you* so well. My husband thought he saw you yesterday, and that you were put out about something.'

'Put out! I did see Colonel Hayward,' said Lady St. Clair, with dignity; 'but I am sure you will understand, dear Mrs.

Hayward, that charming as he is, and much as we all like him, there are circumstances——'

'Circumstances!' cried Mrs. Hayward. 'I don't know indeed any circumstances which can possibly affect my husband. None, certainly, that don't affect me.'

'Oh, we all feel for you,' said the leader of society, pressing Mrs. Hayward's hand.

She had to pass on, fuming with indignation and astonishment, and next minute it was her fortune to meet the lady who had sent her the invitation of the morning: for Mrs. Hayward had by chance stumbled into a tea-party specially convoked for the purpose of talking over the last great piece of news. Though she had as yet no clue to what it was, she felt there was something in the air, and that both in the salutations and the silence of those about her, and the evidently startling effect of her unexpected appearance, there was a secret meaning which was at once perplexing and exasperating. The mere fact of a tea-party of which she knew nothing, in a house so familiar, was startling in the highest degree. She went up eagerly to Mrs. Morton, with a belligerent gaiety. 'How kind of you,' she said, 'to ask me to your ball, the Colonel and *me*!' It is very flattering that you should think me the young person—unless it was all a mistake, as I am obliged to believe.'

'Oh, no mistake,' said the lady, a little tremulous. 'I hope you can come.'

'I—come? But you must be laughing at me,' cried Mrs. Hayward, with a little burst of gaiety. 'Of course I go everywhere as Joyce's chaperon: but to ask *me*, at my age, to a *dance*! My dear Mrs. Morton, you must think me an old fool.'

'Oh, indeed, I should have liked to ask—indeed, if it hadn't been for what was said,—but I hope, I do hope you will come. I am sure I did not mean any—any disrespect——'

'Disrespect! oh, flattery I call it! to think a dance was just the thing for me. My step-daughter will be asked to the dinner-parties, I suppose, now that it is evident the balls are for a young creature like me.'

This lady, who could not conduct matters with so high a hand as Lady St. Clair, slid away behind backs, and concealed herself from those severe yet laughing looks. She had thought it would please Mrs. Hayward to be the one chosen, while the other was left out. Presently Mrs. Hayward fell into the hands of the lady of the house, who led her aside a little. 'I am so glad,' said this friendly person, 'to see you here by yourself. It is so lucky. Of

course I should have asked you to come if it had not been—many of us, you know, don't think we would be doing right if we were to countenance——'

'To countenance—what?' Mrs. Hayward grew pale with astonishment and wrath.

'But I assure you,' cried this lady, 'no one blames *you*. We quite understand how you have been led to do it to please him and for the sake of peace. We don't think one bit the less of you, dear.'

'The less—of me!'

'Rather the more,' said the mistress of the house, giving her bewildered guest a hasty kiss; and then she was hurried off to receive some new-comers. Mrs. Hayward stood and stared round her for a minute or two, neglecting several kind advances that were made to her, and then, without any leave-taking, she walked out of the room and out of the house. She was in a whirl of anger and astonishment. 'Don't blame—me! don't think the less—of me!' This was the most astounding deliverance that had ever come to Elizabeth's ear. She was not in the habit of supposing that any one could think less than the highest of her. The assertion was the profoundest offence. And what could it mean? What was the cause?

Coming down the hill she was met by the Thompsons' big resplendent carriage, which stopped as she drew near, and Lady Thompson leant out, holding forth both hands. 'Oh, how is the poor dear?' said Lady Thompson, beginning to cry: 'I am sure you 'ave too much heart to forsake 'er whatever happens. Oh, how is the poor dear?'

'I don't know whom you mean, Lady Thompson. I never forsake anybody I am interested in—but I don't know what you mean.'

'Oh, I'm sure you're a good woman. I'm sure you're a real lady,' Lady Thompson cried.

Mrs. Hayward walked away from the side of the carriage. Her head seemed turning round. What did it mean? *She?* Who was *she*? Utter perplexity took possession of her. She was so angry she could scarcely think: and Lady Thompson, notwithstanding that warm unnecessary expression of confidence, was, with her blurred eyes and eager tone, almost more incomprehensible than the rest. She walked quickly home to avoid any further insinuated confidence, to think it over, to make out what it meant. Who could tell her what it meant? She saw Mrs. Sitwell at a little distance, and concluded that she would be the most fit interpreter;

but the parson's wife saw her too, and quickened her steps, hurrying away. 'It is her doing,' Mrs. Hayward said to herself. At last she came to her own door. Some one was there before her, standing in the porch waiting till the door should be opened. He turned round at the sound of her step, and stood aside to let her pass, holding out at the same time his hand.

'Captain Bellendean! it is a long time since we have seen you.'

'Yes, a long time. I have been a fool. I mean I have been—busy. I hope you are all well, Mrs. Hayward. My dear old Colonel, and——'

'He is quite well—but I fear you will not find him at home. This is not his hour for being at home.' She stood between him and the open door, barring his passage, as it seemed. It was a way of working off the disturbance and trouble in her mind.

'I hope you will let me in,' he said humbly. 'It is not a mere call. I could wait till he came back. I—I have something important to say to him: and—and—I hope you will let me come in and wait.'

'That is a modest prayer. I cannot refuse it,' she said, leading the way

CHAPTER XLI

JOYCE had to come to a resolution at which she herself wondered, in forlorn helplessness, as if some other being within her had decided upon it and not she. That she, all shy, shrinking, reticent as she was, with the limitations of her peasant pride and incapacity for self-revelation, should attach a last desperate hope to the possibility of enlightenment from some one else's judgment, was wonderful to herself. For how could she lay that tangled question before any one, or unfold her soul? how could any stranger know what her perplexity was, between the claims of the old tranquil yet enthusiastic affections of her youth, and the strange unconfessed dream of absorbing feeling which had swept her soul of late—between the pledges of her tender ignorance, and the fulfilments of a life to which fuller knowledge had come? She did not herself understand how she had come to stand at this terrible turning-point, or why she should thus be summoned to decide not only her own fate, but that of others; and how could she explain it to strangers who knew nothing, neither how she was bound, nor wherein she was free? And yet there came a longing over her which could not be silenced—to ask some one—to make a tribunal for herself, and plead her cause before it, and hear what the oracle would say. Perhaps it was because all her lights had failed her, and all her faculties contradicted each other, that this despairing thought suggested itself—to discover an oracle, and to find out what it would say.

Of whom could she ask, and who could fill this place to her? Not her father. Joyce did not say to herself that the good Colonel was not a wise man, though he was so kind. Had he been the wisest of men, she would have shrunk from placing her heart unveiled in his hand. For to the father everything must be said. He is no oracle; he is a sovereign judge: that was not the help her case required. Her step-mother was more impossible still. If

not to him, still less to her, could the girl, so cruelly wounded, so torn in divers directions, lay open her misery and difficulty. Not to any one could she lay them open. It was an oracle she wanted—something to which a half-revelation, an enigmatical confession would suffice—who would understand before anything was spoken, and give a deliverance which, perhaps, would be capable of various interpretations, which should not approach too closely to the facts. This was what she wanted without knowing what she wanted, with only a strong longing to have light—light such as was not in her own troubled self-questionings and thoughts.

Joyce had not many friends among the people who surrounded Mrs. Hayward with a flutter of society and social obligations. Indeed Mrs. Hayward herself had not many friends, and it is doubtful whether she would have found one to whose judgment she could resort for advice, as Joyce meant to do. But, the girl was perhaps more discriminating by a natural instinct as to who was to be trusted—perhaps in her far higher ideality more trustful. At all events, there were two very different persons to whom, after much tossing about on the dark sea of her distress, her thoughts turned. A little light might come from them; she might unfold herself to them partially, fancifully, leaving them to guess the word of the enigma, finding some comfort in what they said, even if it should fall wide of the mark. When Mrs. Hayward set out to pay her visits in the afternoon, Joyce stole forth almost furtively, though all the world might have seen her going upon her innocent search after wisdom; but the world, even as represented in a comparatively innocent suburban place, would have been at once startled and amused to note at what shrine it was that Joyce sought wisdom and the teaching of the oracle. She went not to any of the notable people, not to the clergy, or even to Mrs. Sitwell, who was supposed to be her friend, and who was known to be so clever. Joyce did not at all know that the parson's wife had played her false, and she had seen more of that lady than of any one else in the place. But this was not because of any innate sympathy, but because of the pertinacity with which Mrs. Sitwell had seized upon Joyce as a useful auxiliary in the carrying out of her own ends—and the girl's instinct rejected that artificial bond, and put no faith in the cleverness which she acknowledged, nor even in the goodness after its kind, which Joyce's mind was large enough to acknowledge too. She went not to Mrs. Sitwell, nor to the parson, Mrs. Sitwell's husband, but she threaded through many lanes and devious ways until she came to a door in a wall with a little bright brass knocker, and a grating, and great thorny branches

of a bare rose-tree straggling over. Within was a small neat green garden, and a little house looking out upon it with shining windows. And within that, coming hastily to the door to meet her, was Miss Marsham, whom everybody knew to be as good as gold, but nobody imagined to be wise or instructive in any way. Joyce had come to find her oracle here.

The room was small and low, full of old china, old pictures, a little collection of relics, in the midst of which their gentle mistress, a mild spirit clad with only as much body as was strictly essential, and with an old gown constructed on the same principles, with just as much old and somewhat faded silk as was strictly necessary, appeared in perfect harmony, the soul of the little dainty place. She received Joyce with the tenderest welcome, in which there was something more than her usual kindness, and an anxiety which Joyce, full of her own thoughts, never perceived. Miss Marsham was ready and prepared to be confided in. She was prepared for the story of Joyce's youth, for the revelation of her peasant parents, and how for their good she had sacrificed herself to Colonel Hayward's fancy—ready to understand at half a word, to condone and to condole, to give praise for the noble motive, the self-sacrifice, and only gently—very gently—to touch upon the deception, which the severest critic could not consider to be Joyce's fault. She kissed her and said, 'My dear child, my poor Joyce,' with a tender pity which forestalled every explanation. Did she then already know Joyce's trouble and sore perplexity? but how was it possible that she should know?

'You must not think I have come just to call,' Joyce said.

'No, dear? but why shouldn't you come just to call? There will never, never be any circumstances in which I shall not be glad to have you come. My dear, circumstances don't matter at all to me when I know any one as I know you!'

Joyce was a little bewildered by this effusion. She said, with a faint smile, 'And yet you don't know me well. I have been here just five months, and part of that away——'

'My love, when you understand a person and love a person, as I do you, the time does not count by months.'

'That is what I feel: and I have nobody—nobody to look to:—you will say my father, Miss Marsham. He is kind, kind—but oh, I have not been brought up with him nor used to open my heart,—and in some things he knows only one language and me another—and besides, if I were to tell him everything, he would say what I was to do, and I would have to obey. And Mrs. Hayward with

him, they would settle it all,—and I am not used to it, and I cannot——’

‘No, Joyce, I understand—it is they who have led you into it—you can’t ask advice from them.’

‘They did not lead me into it,’ said Joyce. ‘It was just nature led me into it, and the perversity of things. Will you ever have noticed in your life how things go wrong? Nobody means any harm, and all you do is innocent; and even if you were very prudent and weighed everything beforehand, there would not be one step that you could say afterwards—This was wrong. And yet things all turn wrong, and your heart is broken, and nothing is to blame.’

‘Oh, Joyce, words cannot say how sorry I am! There was one thing perhaps, my dear, a little wrong—for to deceive in any way, even if it seems to do no harm and is with the best motive—the highest motive, to help those you love——’

Joyce sighed softly to herself, no longer asking how Miss Marsham could know, then shook her head. ‘I wish it had been for that motive; but there was no love, no love,—I,’ with a sudden blush, ‘did not know what love meant.’

Miss Marsham looked up with an exclamation of astonishment on her lips, but stopped with her mouth open, wondering. Joyce, whose eyes were cast down, did not see the impulse at all.

‘He had read a great deal—a great deal,’ said the girl. ‘I have never met any one—oh, not here nor anywhere—so well instructed. I thought then that there was nothing so grand as that. He had read a great deal more than I!—he was my—superior in that. It is true, I always knew all the time that I was not—what seemed—— But that might never have come to anything, and besides, I would have thought shame. For I thought that to know the poets, and all that has been written—that was what made a gentleman. Oh, I think shame to say such a thing,—it doesn’t—how can I say it? It seems there must be something more.’

Miss Marsham remained silent in simple bewilderment. Joyce was now talking her own language, which nobody understood.

‘You may say it was deceiving to let him think I cared for him, but that was never what I intended. He said at first, it was enough for him to care for me. Oh, but that is nothing, nothing!’ cried Joyce suddenly, ‘that is only the beginning. Though I cannot keep my word to him, I need not break it,—that would have been easy. It is far, far worse what is to come.’

Miss Marsham took Joyce’s hands into hers. She was lost in amazement, and felt herself swimming, floating wildly, at sea,

among things altogether strange and incomprehensible. She could not reply, but there is always sympathy in a pressure of the hands.

'There was nothing wrong in meeting another man that was my father's friend, that was my dear lady's son,' said Joyce, very low; 'how was I to know that he and me would see each other different from—common folk? How was I to know that they had made it up for him to be the love of—of another girl? And now here I stand,' she cried, rising up holding out her hands in piteous explanation, 'pledged to one, and caring nothing for him, harming another that but for me would do what was meant for him, would do—would do well—with a lady bred like himself, born like himself, not one that had been abandoned like me. Tell me what you would do if you were me! The lady comes and asks me—she has no right. She says that I know trouble and sorrow, but Greta never a disappointment, never a thing that was not happy—and that she'll break her heart; and nobody cares for mine. And she says I should keep my word, though she was the first to say he was not the one for me. And oh, what am I to do—what am I to do?'

Joyce sank down again upon the seat, and covered her face with her hands.

'Oh, my poor Joyce—my dear Joyce!' Miss Marsham cried.

Her head was not very clear at any time—it was apt to get confused with a very small matter. And Joyce's story was confusion worse confounded to the anxious hearer. Even what she thought to be her knowledge of the circumstances deepened Miss Marsham's bewilderment. She knew of the man to whom Joyce was engaged, from whom all the information came; but the after episode—half told, hurried over, which Joyce had no mind to explain fully, which she addressed to the oracle—was as a veil thrown over poor Miss Marsham's understanding. She knew none of these people; the name of Greta brought no enlightenment to her, nor did she know who the lady was, nor who the man was who was mixed up inextricably in this strange imbroglio. She drew Joyce's hands from her face, and laid that hidden face upon her own kind breast, kneeling down to caress and to soothe the poor girl in her trouble. But what to say or what to do Miss Marsham knew not. She did not understand the delicate case upon which her advice was required. And the oracle was mute. There was no response to give. 'Oh, my poor child, my dear child, my poor dear love!' Miss Marsham cried.

After a minute Joyce raised her head and looked at her friend in whom she trusted. She was very pale, her eyes were wet with tears, and looked large and liquid in caves of trouble,—her mouth

quivered a little, like the mouth of a child when its passion-fit is over, and there was a pathetic little break in her voice. 'Tell me,' she said, with a look that searched the very soul, 'tell me what you would do—if you were me.'

'Oh, my pretty Joyce—my poor dear!'

'Tell me,' the girl said, 'would you break *her* heart and wound *him*, all for yourself? Would you break your word and your pledge that you gave when you were poor, all for yourself? as if you had to be happy whatever happened—you! And what right had you to be happy, any more than Greta—or Greta more than you?'

The question, heaven knows, was vague enough—but the oracle was no longer mute. The pilgrim at the shrine had touched the true chord, and at last the priestess spoke. She had a moment of that ecstasy, of that semi-trance of mingled reluctance and eagerness, which makes those pause who have the response of the unseen to give forth to feeble men. Her gentle eyes lit up, then dimmed again; a brightness came over her faded face, giving it a momentary gleam of eternal youth, then disappeared. She trembled a little as she held the votary to her breast.

'Oh Joyce! my darling Joyce! I don't know that I quite understand you, dear. It is all so mixed up. Things that I have heard and that you tell me are so different. I don't know what to think—but if it's a question between you and another, which is to take the happiness and let the other suffer—oh, my child, my dear! do I need to say it to you—do I need to tell you? Joyce, your heart tells you—it's like a, b, c, to a woman. You know——'

'I thought,' said Joyce, with that sob in her throat, following with intent eyes every little movement of her agitated instructor—'I thought that was what you would say.'

'Yes,' said the vestal, the priestess of this new Dodona, 'it is not in our will to choose or to change. You can't leave the heart-break to another. You have to take it, though your spirit may cry out and refuse. I am not wise to give you advice, oh my darling! but I know this, and every woman knows it. Oh, it isn't all that do it, I know, for it's not an easy thing. But when you have strength from above, you can do it. And what is more, it is not in your nature to do anything else. So don't ask me what I would do. You could not—do—any other thing: being you and nobody else: Joyce *that* I know.'

'No,' said Joyce, stumbling, rising to her feet, meeting with a solemn look the wet and weeping eyes of her oracle, 'no, not any other thing.'

‘Not any other thing.’ Miss Marsham would have kept her in her arms, would have wooed her to further speech, would have wept over her and caressed her, and expended all the treasures of her heart in soothing the martyr whom she had thus consecrated. But of this Joyce was not capable. She had got her oracle, and it was clear. It was what she had wanted, not advice, but that divine and vague enigma which corresponded with the enigma of her confession. She resisted gently the softness of her friend’s clinging embrace. Her eyes were full of the awe of the victim who consents and accepts, and is restrained by every solemnity of her religion from any struggle—but who already feels herself to be outside this world of secondary consolations, face to face with the awful realities of the sacrifice. ‘Don’t keep me,’ she said faintly, putting away the thin kind hands that would have held her, ‘I must go—I must go.’

‘Oh Joyce,’ cried Miss Marsham, stricken with a secret terror, ‘I hope I have said right!’

‘I am sure you have said right; it is what I knew. I could not—do—any other thing. Let me go, Miss Marsham, let me go, for more I cannot bear.’

‘Oh, my dearest, I hope I have done right! Oh, stay a little and tell me more! Oh Joyce, God bless you, God bless you, my dear, if you must go!’

She followed the girl to the little door, so flowery and embowered in summer, now overshadowed by those straggling bare branches of the rose-tree, which were good for nothing but to make, had that been wanted, a sharp garland of thorns. Joyce scarcely turned to answer her blessings and good-byes, but went on straight from the door as if hurrying to the place of sacrifice. The thought was folly, Miss Marsham said to herself, and yet it went with a chill to her heart and would not be chased away.

CHAPTER XLII

You could not do—any other thing. If there could be a proof of the divinity of the oracle it was this. It addressed that something within which is more than any external hearing. ‘When thou wast under the fig-tree.’ Who could tell what was in the spirit in secret but the perfect Teacher, who saw all? Joyce received in something of the same way the utterance which had been given in such darkness on the part of its exponent, as is the way of oracles. She felt that it was the true and only revelation. She hurried along in the wintry twilight, her head bent down, avoiding the cold night wind; her heart beating loudly; her eyes hot and suffused with scalding tears, which did not fall; her feet cold, stumbling over every little stone. The certainty which had replaced her doubts and conflicts of mind was scarcely less confusing than they: it did not inspire her as in the procession to the place of sacrifice. Ah! had she to do that boldly in the face of man for a great cause, Joyce knew how high she could have carried her head, and marched with what steady force and triumph. But the way was dark and tortuous, and full of fears,—the wind in her face so cold, the sensation in her heart so full of misery. The oracle had spoken right. It had been what she wanted. It had made her see clearly, driving from her eyes those films of weakness that come up upon the wind and obscure the vision; even when it is most clear. She remembered now that there never could have been any doubt, that she was even pledged to that sole course. Had she not said, ‘I will do as you wish?’ and had not she been blessed and thanked for her resolution? and yet it had failed, and she had sought the oracle—to have it confirmed, as it was right it should be.

Ah! but the oracle is pitiless too. It has no regard for the weakness of—common folk. Joyce was one who had held her head very high, who never in her consciousness had been one of the

common folk. But now, in her despair, consenting to the sacrifice demanded of her, yet with partial revulsions of her mind against it, she took refuge in that common strain of humanity. Those oracles which spoke out of the veiled heights, from which the votaries with bleeding hearts, all torn with special wounds, received such stern and abstract answers—they were right, but they were remorseless. They took nothing into consideration, not the weakness of the victim, nor that bewildering way in which, though cleared off for a moment, doubts and mists would rise again, obscuring, confusing the most certain truth. They had no pity. The devotee, indeed, went to them only for that—to have the support of a certain reply, to hear what, beyond all control of circumstances, was just and right. And for a moment there would be a great calm after the reply had come. But then there would start into the aching heart this complaint: It was remorseless that reply, there was no pity in it. You could not—do any other thing. It was true, true! and yet there were so many other things that could be done; and it was hard, hard for flesh and blood to conform to that pitiless abstract law: it had no regard for the weakness of—common folk. And what was Joyce, after all, but a girl like another?—very little different from Greta, who had to be shielded from trouble: just like the rest—young, fragile, like the girls whom everybody took care of. Oh, the oracle was hard! it had no pity. It never took into account how much or how little a girl could bear!

• This murmur in the heart growing louder as she went on, with strange additions and exasperations from the cold, and the dark, and the physical discomfort around, at last roused Joyce to a kind of despairing rebellion. After you have made your *sortes* and read your fate, does it ever happen that you do not try, or wish to try, another time? Open the book again—be it Virgil, be it the Bible, be it anything, at haphazard, from which superstition or fancy can take a fancied guidance. Try the oracle again. It was the suggestion of despair. But Joyce had always thought of two from whom she might seek the direction she could no longer give herself. She reminded herself now, stopping in her hurried walk towards home, saying with natural sophistry that her consultation of fate was incomplete, that she had always meant the trial to be double. She had always intended it. She had meant to lay her case before him too. He was very unlike the other—the priestess, the vestal, whose decisions Joyce felt in her despair no one could have doubted for a moment. He was very, very different. It was only just that he too should give his verdict. They were the two

sides which ought to stand in every question, which see the matter from different points, which balance and temper each other. Joyce's heart beat very high ; the blood again began to run warm in her veins, reaching her feet, her hands, which were so cold. She turned and hastened back to the rectory, which she had passed.

It was dark by this time, and the lamps were being lighted, coming into life one by one along the darkling way. And the house was half dark, the lights dazzling her in the hall, while there was nothing but soft firelight in the drawing-room, which she passed hastily, telling the servant that it was the Canon she came to see. The Canon was seated at his table writing, or pretending to himself to write, his sermon. He bounded up from his seat with a violent convulsion through all the house, making the windows ring and the boards creak, and the very walls shake, when with some difficulty he realised who his visitor was. 'Joyce!' he cried, with a roll of mild thunder in his voice, and took her by the hand and placed her in a chair. He was much astonished by her visit, yet felt that he knew what had brought her here. The poor girl had heard what was being said about her, and she had come perhaps to confess, if there was anything in that story, that she was a mere foundling, and not Hayward's daughter (but the Canon knew there was nothing in that)—perhaps to ask him for his help, for his advice. And he was pleased beforehand, before she opened her mouth, that she should come to him—not to that man at St. Augustine's, though she had been so much with those Sitwells, but to himself, a much better guide, whom she had said she liked best. Jealousies do not exist between man and man, we know, as they do between woman and woman—and especially not between clergyman and clergyman—but yet the Canon was pleased that it was to him Joyce had come.

'Well,' he said, 'here you are, and I'm delighted to see you. It is not often you go about paying visits, Joyce.'

'Oh no,' she said, 'never.' The shock of finding herself here, opposite to him, in the place of a penitent, come to tell her tale, brought the colour to Joyce's face. She gave him one look, and then turned her eyes away. He was very, very different from Miss Marsham. To sit there and tell him everything struck Joyce as impossible. She had never intended to tell everything. She had meant that the oracle should half divine, should understand before she spoke.

'Come,' he said, 'don't lose courage now you are here. You've come to tell me all about it, Joyce.'

Joyce only looked at him again, her eyes enlarged with alarm and

terror, wondering after all, she who desired to be understood without speaking, what and how he knew. She said under her breath, her eyes being the chief speakers, the words seeming nothing, 'I want you to tell me what to do.'

'You want me——? What are you saying, Joyce? Come, you are not afraid of me. I'm your father's old friend, you know. I don't believe any of that nonsense, and I'm your friend against the world, my dear. Come, speak out, don't be afraid of me.'

He drew his chair nearer hers, once more making the house quiver, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, patted it encouragingly. 'Come, Joyce, be a man,' the Canon said, with the little tremble of a laugh in his big voice.

Joyce answered him only with her eyes. They seemed to grow bigger and bigger in her pale face, telling him a hundred things; but she could not find her voice. She had meant to tell him as much at least as she had told Miss Marsham; but when she found herself before him, a man, with that confused story of hers which was not for a man's ears, Joyce was struck dumb. She made an effort to say something, but failed again. He kept his hand on her shoulder patting it, encouraging her as if she had been a child, 'Come, Joyce, tell me all about it. You are not afraid of me.'

Her voice burst forth suddenly, as if she had forced it, or rather as if it had forced an outlet for itself from some place where it had been pent up. 'Oh, sir!' Joyce cried, 'I cannot speak; but tell me one thing,—if there are two and one must suffer, and you are one of them—must you never make a question, but consent and accept that it shall be you?'

The Canon was altogether taken by surprise. The burst of the voice, hoarse at first, afterwards clearing and quickening in its passionate strain, the question that had nothing to do with what he had expected to hear, but was an abstract question, startled him beyond expression. 'Why, Joyce, Joyce—what is this?' he said.

She turned to him, growing bolder. 'If you are one of two, and one of them must break her heart—and you are the one that is used to that, and the other has known no trouble. Do not ask me what I mean,' said Joyce, 'but oh, you that are a minister, you that have to guide those that are wandering and lost, tell me! They say that it is like a, b, c, and every woman knows; but you are not a woman, you are a man. You will not be carried away by feeling as they are. You will be more just. You will know.'

'My poor child,' said the Canon. He too, like Miss Marsham, took her hand, in utter failure of any other way to help her, and held it, patting it softly between his. 'Joyce,' he said, 'my dear,

you're right. I am only a man, I can't divine what you mean unless you tell me. As far as I can make out, somebody has been talking nonsense to you. What is this a, b, c, that every woman knows? If you'll believe me, Joyce, a woman is just like a man so far as duty goes. There's no law for one more than the other. Tell me what it is, seriously, Joyce.'

She looked up at him once more and opened her lips to speak; but again the impossibility of telling that tale to him closed her lips. Joyce was nearly in despair, and she had a clinging to him as to her friend, one who would help her if he could, one who knew many things and might understand. But when she looked up at the Canon's middle-aged countenance and at his large prosperous person, and the capacious round of his black silk waistcoat, and the air about him of a man who had everything and abounded, her courage and confidence failed her. She was dumb. To tell her youthful trouble to him, all mixed up as it was with love and lovers and trifling things, though so great to her, a matter of life and death—to him, who would be moved by none of these matters—how could she do it? She drew a long breath, which ended in something like a sob—'It is—it is a case of conscience,' she said, with her wistful eyes fixed upon him, making revelations which he could not understand.

'A case of conscience!' he said; 'this is one of your evasions not to speak out. You're like other women, Joyce, which is no shame to you; you would like me to be at all the expense of the talk, my dear, and give you my advice without any knowledge of the circumstances. Let us see what premisses we've got. If I were one of two and knew that one must suffer, would I take it upon me without question that the sufferer must be I—is that what you call the a, b, c, that every woman knows? A great many women are fools, my dear, but not such fools as that. No, Joyce! I should take up no such idea. I should say, let him suffer who deserved it, who had brought it on himself.'

'No,' said Joyce very low. 'She has not done that: we are not ill-deserving—it's no—no wrong—oh, neither her nor me!'

'It is something between two women,' said the clear-sighted Canon. 'It is love then, and there is a man in the question too.'

She made him no reply; but she turned away her face from him, and the Canon saw the colour rise like a fire over her cheek from throat to brow.

'And somebody has put it into your head that the easy way out of it—the fairest way—is to sacrifice yourself? It was a woman that said that, and told you it was the a, b, c. I shouldn't

wonder if it was that old fool Cissy Marsham, it would be just like her. Now, Joyce listen to me——'

'She is not a fool,' said Joyce, turning her face to him again.

'Don't tell me! She's worth a dozen of any of us, but she may be a fool for all that. Now listen to me, Joyce. I say no: do you hear? There's no a, b, c, but plain right and wrong. As for self-sacrifice, in the majority of cases it's a mere silly, idiotic, if not horrible, mistake. Generally it does good to nobody. You fling your own happiness away, and you don't secure any one else's. My dear girl, to consider other people first is in some cases not only uncalled for but wrong.'

Joyce had kept her eyes fixed upon his face. At this there came over hers a faint smile, and she softly shook her head.

'She doesn't believe me,' said the Canon,—'none of them do; on this point good women are all fools, and the better they are the greater fools they are. God bless my soul!—who made you your brother's keeper? How do you know what's best for him? Who gave you the right to humiliate him by sacrificing yourself to him—or her? what does it matter? it's all the same, him or her. I tell you,' cried the Canon, jumping up suddenly, walking round to the fireplace, and standing up against the glow of the fire, his large person rising like a mountain, flinging over Joyce a great shadow, 'women like Cissy Marsham are a pest, they're a plague in the place, with their a, b, c, and their creed for a woman. Nonsense, my dear! that's all nonsense, my dear! What's law for a man is law for a woman. There's no other. Don't break anybody's heart if you can help it; but in the name of common-sense, go your own way and take what God gives you, and have the courage to be happy if He puts happiness into your hands!' The Canon puffed out a hot breath of impatience, and shook himself in his easy large garments as if to settle them all into their places, shaking the house at the same time and making everything ring—'whatever Cissy Marsham may say, the old fool, God bless her!' he cried, with a laugh, throwing himself down again into a big easy-chair.

But Joyce made no reply. It is in the nature of an oracle to divine what is congenial to the nature of the devotee—to give a deliverance which, however confusing, will have something in it which will carry out its natural tendencies, and agree with his inner sense. But to Joyce this voice brought no such message. To be bidden to be happy was no part of her requirements. She did not understand what happiness in the abstract was. According to her austere peasant training, it was so far from being the object

of life, that to seek it was an unworthy and undignified, even wrong thing. She had been happy all her life without knowing; but to look for happiness, to seek it, to make it the object of every exertion, was incompatible with all the rules of life which she knew. 'Happy! you will just do your work and your duty, and be thankful for what the Lord sends ye,' Janet Matheson would have said. What the Canon said was not very different: 'Go your own way and take what God gives.' But the meaning was different; oh, the meaning was different! Don't break anybody's heart if you can help it; but if you do, never mind—have the courage to be happy all the same. This oracle spoke too loudly, too plainly, with too distinct a note. It found no echo in her heart. It was not the guidance for which she craved.

The Canon saw perhaps that he had not been successful. He tried to draw her into conversation of a less momentous kind. 'I hear you've had some visitors from your old home, Joyce. I fear they've been injudicious visitors, talking a great deal of nonsense; but I hope they brought you good news at least of your people—old people, weren't they, that brought you up? I'm ready to give them a certificate of success in that line,' the Canon added in his fine bass, which lent itself very tenderly to these paternal words, and with a pleasant laugh.

Joyce looked up at him with a startled glance. She had, indeed, put no question to Andrew as to the beloved old people. There had not been a word about them, or any other question of life—nothing but his claim, and her resistance yet acknowledgment, and all the confused miserable discussions. She seemed to fall into a slough of despond, the miry pit and the horrible clay of the Scriptures, when her heart went back, sick, to that visit. Ah! she thought, had that been all—had there been nothing but Andrew! But with the instinct of her natural reticence she only replied, 'They are well—they always write that they are well.'

'That's good.' Dr. Jenkinson meant to take advantage of the opportunity to ask further questions, to elicit, if he could, something of the true story upon which Mrs. Sitwell had built her romance; but when he looked at Joyce's pale and musing face, and saw that the girl could scarcely withdraw herself from the consideration of her perplexity, whatever it was, to answer him, and that she had no attention to give to other matters, his heart smote him. He could not question her, force her out of herself, to satisfy his curiosity. He said nothing more for a whole minute; but the silence did not frighten Joyce, nor force her to speak. She

sat lost in her own problem, to which he felt his energetic counsel had brought no light. The Canon had been impatient; he had thought it best to crush these foolish womanish thoughts on the threshold of her mind; but he had not succeeded. What he had said had been a disappointment and confusion only—no enlightenment to Joyce.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘we can’t sit silent like this and look at the fire. When you and me get together we want to talk, Joyce. Give me some of your opinions. You’re not satisfied with mine, I can see.’

She looked up at him without any smile and shook her head.

‘Out with it!’ cried the Canon. ‘We always do have a little fight. Let me hear where I am wrong. That’s the worst of your Saint Cissy, and other such. They don’t say a word for themselves, they’re only meekly obstinate after the manner of saints. Come! out with it, Joyce!’

‘Oh,’ said Joyce, ‘I cannot speak! My heart says no to you, but I cannot give a reason—it’s because it’s far too serious. I thought of her and of you, that are so different, that might give me a light where all is dark—but I can give no reason. I must just go on till the moment, and then do—what is put into my heart.’

‘My poor child!’ cried the Canon, alarmed, ‘can’t you tell me what is wrong? Do nothing rash, whatever it is—do nothing that can’t be undone. Joyce, I am afraid of you. You are not like the rest of them: never mind any nonsense I have said, but tell me, tell me sincerely, what is wrong. Don’t shake your head. You have come to consult me of your own free will—tell me what it is——’

‘I cannot,’ she said piteously; ‘I cannot!—oh, I would if I could: it’s maybe nothing at all—I cannot speak. It’s—it’s love that is stronger than death,’ cried the girl, ‘and love that is nothing, that is but fancy, and a dream—— I’ll think nothing more of it. I’ll think nothing! The moment may never come, and if it comes, no one can help me. I must do—what is in my heart——’

The Canon drew his chair in front of her with a look that was more searching than his questions, and which she could not support save for a second. ‘Mind what I say, Joyce. Nobody made you your brother’s keeper. If it’s beautiful to make a sacrifice, as you women think, it’s shameful to accept one. Remember that. You’ve no right to put a shame and humiliation upon another. It’s a humiliation—you would yourself refuse it and scorn it.

Joyce, whatever you may be tempted to do, remember what I say——'

She tried to speak, struggling with tears. 'The greatest of all——was a sacrifice, a sacrifice——'

'Hush!' he said imperatively. 'When there is One to be found in His conditions there need be no discussion. And that one man should die for the people, I allow—and that you should die physically rather than let another die, if it is in your heart to do it, that I allow. But that you should make yourself the judge in other circumstances, and shame another by suffering for him when you know neither his heart, nor what is best for him, nor anything but your own wild enthusiasm—that I forbid, Joyce. I forbid it, being your priest, to whom you have come for light.'

Joyce raised her wistful eyes, which were wet with tears hanging on the lashes. But she shook her head. She was a little Presbyterian, as he had said. Perhaps the name of the priest lessened instead of strengthening his power.

CHAPTER XLIII

CAPTAIN BELLENDEAN followed Mrs. Hayward into the house. It was unusually silent, no one stirring, not even a dog. The air was very warm and soft inside, the fire having the room to itself, and burning in a quiet genial way to keep itself company, with a clear red glow that lighted up everything. The tea-table stood untouched—the curtains drawn a little more than usual over the sides of the windows to keep out the cold, and making a still earlier twilight than that outside. The emptiness and silence and vacancy of that warm and luxurious room, so softly carpeted, curtained, cushioned, so evidently expectant of inhabitation, with all its certain signs and marks of habitual tenancy, yet all empty and silent, were more impressive almost than the emptiness of real abandonment. Mrs. Hayward opened the door of the room for her visitor, and bade him go in while she herself looked for the others. ‘I’ll see if they are in,’ she said; and her heart gave a little jump of expectation as she said it. If she had found Joyce, she would have sent the girl into the drawing-room, while she herself took off her ‘things’ in the most leisurely way upstairs; and she would not have pursued her researches with any idea of finding the Colonel. It annoyed her very much to find Joyce’s room empty, and no trace of her visible. She went over every room where her step-daughter could be before she gave up the search, asking the maids, and finally Baker, though she had no desire to take that personage into her confidence. Colonel Hayward’s lamp was already burning in the library. It was his hour for reading the rest of the paper left unfinished in the morning, and sometimes for a doze; but Joyce was not there.

‘Miss Hayward have gone out, ma’am,’ Baker said.

‘Oh, has she? I had something to say to her. (She would not have Baker think that it was because of Captain Bellendean’s

visit that she wanted Joyce.) Ask her to come to me in the drawing-room the moment she comes in.'

'I will, ma'am,' said Baker, with stolid gravity; but he chuckled when his mistress, much put out, turned towards the drawing-room door. *He* knew very well why Joyce was so urgently wanted. 'He 'ave come up to the scratch at last,' Baker said to himself.

Captain Bellendean stood by himself upon the Persian rug before the fire. He was in a very restless mood. There was something in this warm, soft afternoon atmosphere, the sense of domestic calm, the composure of settled life, which was like an insufficient opiate, exciting instead of calming. He was not in a comfortable or happy state of mind. The last time he had been here he was at the height of warm and spontaneous love, bewitched by the presence of the girl who had transported him out of all his bachelor reluctances and defences. This is perhaps a strange way in which to speak of the lover. It is the woman who is supposed to defend herself, to hold back with reluctance, either real or assumed. However, it is one of the enlightenments of our age to recognise that there are two sides to that question. Norman Bellendean had not made up his mind to marry when he took possession of his estate. He did not want even to take possession of his estate; he would have preferred that his father should have held it in his place a few years longer, until he felt more disposed to settle down. But that had not suited Mr. Bellendean's ideas or plans: and Norman, fresh from India, and with a natural desire after the pleasant experiences of a rich young man's untrammelled career at home, found himself at once introduced into the responsibilities of an estate and the bondage of a conspicuous position much against his will. But he had set his face against the natural results. He knew that it was expected of him that he should marry and 'settle down.' He had an idea even that his neighbours had kindly selected for him a certain number of eligible young ladies among whom he would be expected to make his choice. To be sure nobody could force him to make any such choice. He was free as the air to choose elsewhere, or not to choose at all. But the consciousness that this was what was expected of him chafed the young man. He was coy at first like a girl, on his defence, yet sometimes, with laughter and shame, became conscious of his own little coquetries, and felt how ludicrous was the situation altogether. And then he fled to town, to the excitements of the season, to take his share, for the first time, in that whirl and hurry of entertainment and assembling together which we call

society. And then—but this was the thing unaccountable in the midst of so many things which he saw through and understood—he fell in love; and before he knew, was on the eve of asking to share his fortune, and to ‘settle down’ with him at Bellendean, the girl who had been, a few months before, the village school-mistress there.

Norman had fallen in love honestly, spontaneously, without any preparation or *arrière-pensée*. He had neither said to himself that this was the one woman for him, or that she was altogether out of the question for him being what she was. Before he had begun to suspect it, the thing was done. He had thought it was the river, the rowing, the greater simplicity and freedom of the merry party, something in the summer air that was itself delicious as an escape out of London, before he found out that it was Joyce. He had indeed just found out that it was Joyce on the last occasion, when he walked with her home from the garden-party at Sir Sam’s. He had found it out, and in the rush and flood of feeling had told her—he scarcely knew what. He tried to recollect after what he had said, and he could not. He knew that she had not responded; that she had kept him at arm’s-length; and that when he had rushed away, unable to bear the constraint of other people’s society while it was she—she only—whom he wanted, he had said he would come back. The recollection was all confused, disturbed, made uncertain even by excessive thinking over and attempts to remember every detail. And then he had been called away, and it was not possible for him to go back; and then cold afterthought had seized upon him in his heat of love. She had made no reply—what she had said had been ‘No,’ though he did not believe that she had meant the final ‘No’ which would annihilate all his pretensions. He had known that she did not mean that: he had seen in her something of the flood of feeling which had overwhelmed himself. He had gone up to town with his heart throbbing and his head swimming, in anticipation of what would happen when he went back. That was not how a man felt when he expected the ‘No’ which would make an end of all.

But he did not come back—for the moment could not, being called back to Bellendean; and then—did not. Why? Because of the chill of the afterthought which took possession of him; because he remembered, not immediately but after a time, who Joyce was. She was his old Colonel’s daughter, it was true, who was a match for any gentleman. Yes, a match for any gentleman. Colonel Hayward’s daughter, a distinguished soldier, a man who was as good as the best. Under royalty, Colonel Hayward’s

daughter might have married any one—no man daring to have said that it was a *mésalliance*. But then at Bellendean she was the village schoolmistress. Nobody knew much about Colonel Hayward, though they had all heard the story; but everybody knew Joyce. He was aware, for he had heard it talked of, that for Joyce herself it was hard to throw off the habits of her previous existence; and that she was wounded even when told that she must no longer say Miss Greta, and must submit to be treated on a footing of equality by the lady to whom she had looked up. He remembered all this with an acute sense of pain, when he had time to think. That his wife should still have these instincts of inferiority; that she should wish to say Miss Greta; that she should look up to his step-mother as to a being of a superior kind—he grew hot and red at the thought. His wife! It was impossible—it could not be.

These thoughts chilled him to his very heart, and stopped the flood of love which was carrying him away. And many other thoughts came in to add to them. Norman himself was not well known in his county. There was a slight feeling against him as a man who had (though quite innocently on his part) supplanted his own father. He wanted a wife who should be unquestionable, who should be popular—able to help him to the full acquisition of his proper standing in the place. And if he were to bring home to be the mistress of Bellendean a girl whom everybody knew indeed, but knew as Joyce the schoolmistress!—his heart sank within him at that thought, which was suggested by several concurring things; by his step-mother, who, without mentioning Joyce, had laid the state of affairs very clearly before him, and by other incidental remarks and occurrences which supported her view. All these things disturbed his mind greatly. And he had occupations, perhaps arranged for the purpose, to keep him at home. And Greta's home was at hand, where there was always a sympathetic listener for everything he wanted to say. He did not speak to Greta of Joyce, but Greta spoke of her freely, always with love and admiration, which soothed him, yet at the same time diverted his thoughts a little in affectionate gratitude and approval of this generous little creature, who combined everything that was most desirable in a wife, just as Joyce combined everything that was least desirable. And then there were the poor couple in the village, whom Norman went religiously to see at first, to tell them about their lost child; then with a hunger of the heart that could not be satisfied, to talk about her. He never asked himself how he would like to have this old couple, so excellent, so blameless—

worthy of all respect, and more than respect—at Bellendean, calling its mistress J'yce, and weeping over her; but the thought, of which he was ashamed, shot across his mind like lightning every time he heard their name.

These things worked in his mind and made him miserable. His step-mother talked to him of marrying, and of the necessity of making a wise choice to establish his position; and Greta met him at every corner—either he was invited to her father's house, or she came to see her dear aunt Margaret. The girl was entirely innocent of any conspiracy in the matter; but Norman was her hero, and it was scarcely possible for her to conceal her interest in him—her joy when he came, her regret when he went away. It was not difficult for him to discover that in everybody's opinion Greta was the fittest of wives for him. He could not shut his eyes to the fact that it was so. If he had never seen Joyce, if he had never entered that enchanted country in which she dwelt, never floated on that magic river, never strayed in that garden of dreams—never met and parted—then Greta would have been his bride. She would have come to Bellendean so naturally and simply, with such a carrying out of all good wishes for its new lord, that the marriage would have been pronounced by all to be one of those made in heaven.

But now another image had come in. Sometimes he would wish in his distress that it had never done so—that he had never seen her: but that did not change the fact that she had come in and changed everything. The conflict had grown harder every day. Then he had gone to the Highlands, to the moors, and there the struggle took another form. His demon, his other self, who maintained the controversy with him, began to put it before Norman that he had 'behaved badly' to Joyce. Perhaps—we know so little about these demons or daemons, who are continually interfering in our affairs, making and meddling, and have so little light as to their motives—perhaps that most secret of companions meant to deter him by the shame of that bad behaviour from going near Joyce again. But if so, he calculated without his host. For Norman, in a blaze of shame and self-indignation which drove him like a fiery wind, hurried straight off to London, on the spot, to see Joyce instantly and put himself right.

It was in this mood that he arrived, and found himself in the familiar scene of his summer romance, under grey twilight skies, and in the cosy empty room, lighted with the red firelight, silent, comfortable, full of the poetry of domestic life, which is different from the poetry of the river and the garden. He knew that Mrs.

Hayward had gone to look for Joyce, and that she would not come back to disturb the *tête-à-tête*, but would leave them together, as mothers seemed to do, with an instinct of what is coming. He would rather have met Joyce unawares without any warning, without any possibility of a concerted meeting of which the parents should be in the secret. It annoyed him to think that she would be warned, that along with the sudden intimation that he was there, there would be a word of advice or at least a look, to show her what was expected of her. This added to his restlessness as he stood before the red glow of the fire changing from one foot to the other, anxious, impatient, yet feeling that the chill fit, the mental ague which alternated with the fever, might be on its way. He heard little movements in the house—some one walking overhead—some one running upstairs—a voice sounding faintly calling some one. Was Joyce reluctant then to come? Was she angry with him for not returning sooner? Was she displeased with the warning given her, and unwilling to come down to him in the empty drawing-room while everybody knew what must take place there? It would be like her to refuse. It would be what he should expect of her; but in what a position would it place *him*!—a lover understood yet undeclared, whose object was unmistakable, yet who was not to be allowed to carry it out. His heart began to beat, partly with anger, partly with suspense, partly with love. Would not she come? He was so impatient that he could have seized her and shaken her in exasperation and excitement; and yet he could not but grumble in his moustache, that by Jove she was right, and that it was just what he would have expected of Joyce.

Presently, however, the sounds outside became more audible, and he made out that it was the Colonel's step which was coming towards the drawing-room. 'Captain Bellendean!' Colonel Hayward was saying; 'why didn't you bring him to the library? Why, Norman, my fine fellow! how do you do?—I'm delighted to see you; but why that ass should have sent you in here in the dark—I can't see you a bit—is more than any mortal could divine—when he knew the ladies were out, and I was sitting by myself.'

'I came in with Mrs. Hayward. I assure you it wasn't the man's fault.'

'Oh, well, if Elizabeth knows. She'll be down immediately, no doubt. Bring us some light, Baker. Yes, yes, the firelight is very pretty, but I always like to see to talk. Come up about business, Bellendean?'

'Yes,' said Norman, with a little hesitation. 'I may say it is business, though not quite what is usually called by that name.'

'I thought so. Nothing else would bring one of you young fellows to town at this time of the year. Tell your mistress, Baker, we are waiting for her to give us some tea. Mrs. Bellendean was here yesterday to bid us good-bye; or perhaps I should say to bid good-bye to Joyce: for I think we came a long way after Joyce in her estimation, my wife and I.'

'I hope,' said Bellendean, with a catch in his breath, 'that Miss Hayward—is quite well.'

'Oh yes, she is very well. I have thought sometimes that this air didn't suit her—it's a great change from the North. It gave me great pleasure, however, to find, when we were talking the other day, that she likes it on the whole. She has a wonderfully pretty way of expressing herself. I should like to tell you a thing she said to me. I was questioning her on this subject, anxious to get her true sentiments. And she said, "You are my home, father."—Eh, don't you think it was pretty? Well, I'm an old fool—it brought the water to my eyes. Hush, here's Elizabeth; she says I am like a child with a new toy. I bore everybody with my stories of Joyce.'

'It would not be easy to bore me—on that subject.'

These last words were drowned by the entrance of Mrs. Hayward. She had taken off her things, leaving it to her husband to entertain the visitor. Joyce's absence annoyed her exceedingly. It was quite unusual, and seemed a sort of climax of misfortune—or perversity: perversity was the view to which Mrs. Hayward inclined.

'I don't know what can have become of Joyce,' she said, after she had poured out tea for the gentlemen. 'She is never out at this hour. It is getting dark, too late for her to be out.'

'Are you anxious, my dear?' cried the Colonel, rising. 'Bless me! it is always you who think of everything. I'll go at once and bring her home.'

'Nonsense, Henry!—there is nothing to be anxious about. She has stayed somewhere for tea. Last time we saw you, Captain Bellendean, you expected to return to town—earlier than this. I suppose you had still a good deal to arrange before your father and Mrs. Bellendean left you to your own devices?'

'I have been very busy,' said Bellendean in a subdued tone, which the Colonel did not understand.

'He has come up about business now,' said Colonel Hayward; 'and very dull you will find it, Bellendean, I don't doubt, though I am told that more people come to London at this time of the

year than used to do so. You must run down as often as you can and look us up—as you did in summer, you know——’

‘Summer and winter are two very different things,’ said Mrs. Hayward ; ‘and Captain Bellendean feels that, Henry. In summer there’s the river, you know, and—other things.’

‘The other things,’ said Norman with an effort, ‘last all the year through ; and they are more important even than the river.’

Captain Bellendean was very ill at ease. He had not thought of these surroundings at all, nor of any questions that might be put to him on the subject of his long delay, nor of anything indeed but Joyce. It had been comparatively easy in the outdoor summer life to secure an interview with her. Now as he looked round him, and saw Mrs. Hayward seat herself in her habitual chair by her habitual table, with that air of settled and permanent possession which the mistress of a house has in her own corner, and the Colonel thrown back in a larger chair on the other side, a sense of being surrounded and shut in came upon him. Joyce was not here, which took all the meaning out of his coming ; but if she had been here between this pair to whom she belonged, what could he have said to her ? Colonel Hayward’s daughter surrounded by all the fortifications of life was a different thing from Joyce,—the girl whom to love and seek was a sort of social crime. There was no question here of a tremendous social downfall, of the *mésalliance* and mistake against which he had been warned. He had fully understood that side of the question, and it had chilled him even in his heat of love. Now the tables were turned ; it was he who was suspected and disapproved of, and from whom the parents were defending their daughter. This unexpected drawback chilled him still more.

Norman sat for a long time in that exceedingly comfortable, warm, beautifully furnished room, with his old Colonel, for whom he had the greatest respect, and the Colonel’s commander, the much-famed Elizabeth, over whose name he had jested, but of whose personality he had always been a little afraid. He sat and made conversation, or rather listened to that which went on across him, growing more and more embarrassed and uncomfortable. He seemed to hear doors opening and closing all over the house, but Joyce never appeared ; and footsteps in the hall and on the stairs, but no sign of her coming. His head began to get confused with the contrariety and annoyance. Fate and Mrs. Hayward seemed to have joined the conspiracy against him, in which everybody was at Bellendean—and, as he now blushed to think, he had not expected any contrariety here. He had thought—coxcomb that he

was!—that here he would be master of the situation. He had thought he knew that Joyce would not say him nay. The shy glance, the rising colour, even the startled opposition to his half-spoken love-making on their last interview, had given him an assurance that Joyce was not indifferent. But even this assurance came back upon him with a keen sense of shame and wounded vanity. He had been a fool. How could he tell what she would say to him, while here were the father and mother talking, perhaps keeping her out of sight, at least securing that even if she came nothing could be said? And she did not come—though it seemed to Captain Bellendean that hours had elapsed since he entered the drawing-room in the firelight, and imagined to himself the little comedy, the mother seeking the daughter, hurrying her downstairs and into the arms of the waiting lover. He realised with the most stinging shame that he had imagined that—though the reality was so different, so ludicrously different, he tried to say with a laugh at himself—so painfully different, as he felt in his heart.

After a long time he rose. 'I am afraid it is getting late. I must not lose—the next train. I have—something to do in town,' he said.

'Go! without your dinner!' said the Colonel, in his cheerful ignorance. 'No, no, you must not think of that. And Joyce would be disappointed not to see you. Tell him, my dear, he must stay to dinner at least. We don't let old friends go like this.'

'I am afraid I must go,' said Norman, with the stony air of a departing Englishman, always uneasy lest he should be made to change his resolution. He was offended, wounded, shamed by the difference between the reality and his imagination. 'I—have a great deal to do in town—and the little time——'

'Then you are leaving again soon?' Mrs. Hayward said. She had risen from her chair at once as if to give him no excuse for changing his mind; though that was not what she meant.

'But we must see him again, Elizabeth. No, no, I'll take no denial. Why, Joyce will be distressed not to see you. You must come another day and stay to dinner. It is a long time since we have had a good talk,' cried the Colonel. 'I want to hear all your plans. Come, come, Bellendean, there's no getting off it. You must come another day.'

He was turned all the wrong way. He had come with great strain of purpose, feeling all the magnitude of the step before him, knowing the sacrifice that was involved as well as the gain. And nothing at all had come of it, not even a recognition on the part of

the spectators of the immense importance of what he had been about to do. 'I am afraid it's impossible,' he said, with stony looks; and then there came over him a sudden vision of Joyce in all her sweetness. Joyce, the only poetry he had ever felt, the only romance that had ever revealed itself to him. Was he to give her up for this? 'Perhaps,' he added, 'if you are disengaged on Thursday.' His tone was ungracious, but his heart gave a leap, belying the outward stolidity of disappointment and half offence.

'Thursday, or any day,' cried the Colonel, in his hospitality. 'You don't think we should count any trumpery little engagement against a visit from you! Well, that's better—that's better, Bellendean; and good-bye, my dear fellow; you'll have a run for the train, if you must go.'

The Colonel came out bareheaded to the door to hasten the departure of the guest to whom it was so indispensable not to lose the train. He stood there for a moment looking at his watch in the light of the lamp in the hall. 'It is all he will do to catch it,' he said; 'but he has good long legs of his own, which is better than a cab when you're in a hurry. Shut the door, Baker, there's a dreadful draught. Why, Jenkinson, is that you? You've brought my girl home, like a good fellow. And, Joyce, my dear, you've come five minutes too late. Norman Bellendean has just darted off to catch his train.'

CHAPTER XLIV

THE Canon had brought Joyce home. He had tucked her hand under his arm, and led her through the dark as carefully as her father would have done, talking much, but getting very little response. He looked like a mountain moving along in the gloom, or like a big ship with a slim little yacht in tow; and other wayfarers could hear his voice coming out in the mist, with sometimes a faint note of reply. The Canon was not talking to her of moral difficulties or cases of conscience, but of a party which was to take place at the rectory, and at which he wished her to look her best. 'If you will do me a favour,' he said, 'you will put those questions all away, and put on the pretty looks with which you captivated me, Joyce. Eh? don't you remember? it's not so long ago; how you went and put yourself on the other side, and waved your flag in my face, you little—— But it was all in vain, my dear, for we fell in love with each other just the same.'

A smile came upon her face as she looked up at him through the fog and the faint lamplight that streamed in distinct rays across that solid atmosphere. 'Yes,' she said.

'You can't deny it,' said the Canon; 'for my part, it was at first sight. Well, Joyce, to please me, and your father—though I don't know that he has the same right—you will go back to that moment, and look your best. I want you to look very nice indeed—so does my wife. We mustn't give the adversary occasion to blaspheme.'

'But I have no adversary,' said Joyce, 'unless it were——' .

'Eh? I don't doubt you have somewhere, as all of us have, somebody you've been too good to. And keep away from that little parson woman, Joyce. I'm a parson myself, you will say; but there are parsons and parsons. Is that some one leaving your house? and there is your father standing out in the night air without a hat; the most foolish thing he could do. You catch

cold without any warning, and then there's no getting rid of it. Hey, Hayward! don't shut the door upon us, please; I've brought you home your little girl.'

The Colonel shouted, 'Why, Jenkinson, is it you?'—as we have seen—and stood in the doorway to greet his visitor. 'Come in,' he said, 'come in out of the fog. If you had been coming in the opposite direction you'd have run into Bellendean. He has not been five minutes gone.'

'I only wish we had run into him,' said the Canon in his rolling bass; 'it might have cleared up some things.'

'What do you mean, Canon? He's a nice fellow, but not particularly clever. Come in, and don't stand out in the fog.'

'Go in yourself, and don't catch cold. I've done my duty now; I've brought you home, Joyce. Take care of her, Hayward,' said the Canon, as he strode away, marching like a regiment, with his long coat swinging, and the black silk waistcoat charging the heavy air. Colonel Hayward withdrew within the shelter of the door, putting up his hand to his head, which was his vulnerable point.

'Take care of her!' he said; 'my own girl! I should think I would take care of her. These parsons take a great deal upon them. They think they always know better than other people though they have neither chick nor child.' The Colonel repeated these words to himself with a little chuckle, as he went back to his library to finish something he had been reading in the paper before dinner. The Canon looked very big and imposing, and took a great deal of authority upon himself, but he was wholly without experience in the point upon which he presumed to lecture his old friend. Take care of her—his own little girl! a pretty thing for a man to say who had never succeeded in securing anything of the kind for himself.

Joyce went into the drawing-room with her heart beating, sick and faint. She seemed to feel in the air that he had been there. There was something of him still about the room—the mark of his elbow on a cushion, the sensation of his breath. He had come after all. She wanted to stand where he had stood, to breathe the same air, and then—and then—to fly where she could never see him—where it should be impossible to be tempted to his destruction. No, no; and to break Greta's heart. Her own throbbed quick but low. There had been a momentary spring, but only for a moment. No, no, not for his harm, and the breaking of Greta's heart. His coming seemed to have precipitated and brought near what was so far off a little while ago. She was on the edge of the

precipice now—and there was something in the sense of the giddy vacancy before her that seemed to sweep and suck her towards the edge. She went in—and found Mrs. Hayward standing waiting for her in the middle of the room.

'Where have you been, Joyce? where have you been?—to-day of all days! Captain Bellendean has been here——'

She said, 'Yes, I heard,' almost under her breath.

'And why were you not here to meet him? I don't suppose it was your fault. It could not be your fault. But why, why were you not here? It is like a bad fate.'

'It would be rather a providence,' said Joyce, in her subdued voice—'for it's better; oh, it's better not. I am—glad—I wasn't here.'

Mrs. Hayward grasped her hand with an impatient exasperation. 'Glad—you weren't here—glad to have driven him almost frantic—and me too!'

Joyce looked at her step-mother, wondering. She was so forlorn that any sympathetic tone, even though it was angry, caught her ear. And she felt the circumstances to be so desperate that she was no longer afraid. 'You?—are you caring—anyway?'

'Am I caring! You mean, do I care? Yes, I care. Joyce!' cried Mrs. Hayward, gripping her hands tightly, then losing them with a little impatient gesture, as if she had flung them away, 'you are a strange girl—you have never tried to make me love you. And I don't know that I do. It was a great change to me, that had been everything to my husband, to have you a stranger brought in: and you never tried to make me care——'

'I was bewildered,' the girl said. 'I was—like a creature astray——'

'Very likely. I am not asking the cause; I am only telling you. But now there's something got up that we must stand against. They've got to know about that man—and that you were only—a poor girl before. They are making a stand against you.'

Joyce stood up against the glow of the fire listening, yet only half roused. She was taller than Mrs. Hayward, and the energetic, almost impassioned little woman looked up at her pale face, and thought it like a face in a dream. It was abstracted, the eyes veiled, as if they were looking inward. And neither to have thus lost her lover's visit, nor to be threatened with a conspiracy against her, awakened her out of the mist of her own thoughts. Mrs. Hayward put her hand on Joyce's arm with the quick impatience of her nature—'Wake up,' she said. 'I don't know what you

have in your mind : but give your attention to what I am saying. Wake up ! it is of the greatest importance, if not to yourself, to your father and to me——'

'Yes,' said Joyce, with a little start ; 'I am hearing every word you say, and minding. Oh, don't think I've a cold heart. I am only just all astray—since ever I came. I was a stranger, as you say. And I might learn better—if there was time.'

'There is plenty of time,' said Mrs. Hayward, with a little moisture in her eyes. 'Men never see it—but it was a great trial for you and me. Yes, yes, for both of us. I always saw that. But we must make a stand now, and do it together. They say you're not your father's daughter, but a foundling—and they say you've got a man coming after you that made a disturbance—a low man. Don't contradict me or put my temper up ! He was not a low man, but quite respectable, I know that—but all the same a man to be put a stop to. Joyce ! don't you understand what a vexation it is that you were not here ! He came with his heart in his mouth to lay everything at your feet. And the triumph it would have been for us all to have faced them, with you engaged to Norman Bellendean !'

A colour like the flash of a light passed over Joyce's face. Her eyes filled suddenly with large hot tears. She shook her head, with a trembling going over her like the sudden shiver of ague. 'No,' she said, 'no—never that ; oh, never that !'

'Why never that ? Don't be a fool, Joyce, don't be a fool. Though he's an excellent match, there's nobody near, nobody anywhere that would suit you so well. You understand each other. For goodness' sake,' cried Mrs. Hayward, exasperated and anxious, 'don't spoil your life with any romantic nonsense ! Why, even his people like you and seek you. Mrs. Bellendean——'

'I must tell you the truth,' said Joyce, 'for oh, I am in a great strait, and I know not what to do. Mrs. Bellendean would rather I were dead than that. There is one he should marry that would break her heart—and there is one I should marry : *that* I will not do ; but I will marry nobody nor think of anything that could hurt her—or him. No, not for all the world.'

Mrs. Hayward clapped her hands together in the wild impatience and rage which could not find utterance in mere words. 'Oh, that was it !' she cried. 'I thought there was something treacherous in it. I thought she did not come for nothing, that woman ! I never liked her, for all her show of kindness. I never put any faith in her. And she came to take advantage of your simplicity, you poor thing—you poor innocent thing !' Elizabeth's temper was

warm, but her heart no less. She caught Joyce suddenly in her arms, and gave her a quick kiss, which was like a soft little blow—and the girl felt that the cheek which touched hers was wet. But it was only a momentary touch, and Mrs. Hayward was half ashamed of her emotion. She gave an imperative grasp to Joyce's arms as she let her go, and added with a little laugh, 'But let us stand together, Joyce—you and me! and we'll be too many for them. I don't mind how strong they are—we'll be too many for them yet—you and me!'

Colonel Hayward coming in at this moment, with his newspaper in his hand to read something aloud to his wife (who had seen it before breakfast), found them standing very close together, and heard the sound of his wife's laugh, which sounded to him more like crying than laughing. And he knew that the sound meant a good deal of commotion in Elizabeth's mind. He did not know what might have been going on; and while he was eager to interfere, his better angel kept him back by means of that prejudice against prying, which is a happy part of English training. Accordingly he did not come near, but pretended it was necessary to hold up his paper to the lamp. 'My dear, I just wished to read you this little bit,' he said, turning his shoulder to the pair. Mrs. Hayward could scarcely restrain the exclamation of impatience on her lips; but perhaps it was well that so exciting an interview should thus be brought to a simple and unconcerted end.

After this there followed two uneventful days—uneventful to the rest of the world; not quite so to Mrs. Hayward, who was employed in searching out all the ramifications of the social conspiracy against her husband and Joyce, with a warmth of defensive feeling and determination to support and vindicate what was her own side and her own belongings, which roused every amiable sentiment—and there were many—in her heart. She was kept in a subdued fever of expectation at the same time, looking almost every hour for the arrival of Norman Bellendean, who would not, she believed, keep to the invitation given him for Thursday, but might at any moment burst in upon them and set everything right. She did not believe that he would have the coolness to wait till that appointed time, and her devices for retaining Joyce within reach were manifold and sometimes very amusing, had there been any one with a mind free to observe the situation. Colonel Hayward, without having any reason given, was charged to be punctual in bringing her back from the morning walk at a certain hour:—and Elizabeth herself took the direction of affairs in the afternoon, taking Joyce with her when she herself went out, and regulating a

succession of returns which made it impossible that any visitor could have very long to wait. It must be allowed that this extreme care was harassing to Joyce, unaccustomed to so numerous a round of little engagements, and who hitherto had been free to follow her own devices and think her own thoughts. These thoughts, it was true, could be carried on anywhere, and were as possible in the drawing-room under her step-mother's eyes as when alone; but they were confused and weakened by the sense of some one near—by the interruption of questions which she had to answer, and remarks to which she was supposed to pay attention.

The gathering web of purpose and meaning was thus confused into a sort of cobweb maze, like the threads of a spider twisted with everything they encountered; and Joyce felt herself thus held in suspense, still with that sweep and suction in the air which betrayed the precipice close by—but rather with the sensation of one who lay upon the edge bound and helpless, perhaps to be swept over by the first gale, but in herself quiescent, capable of no movement—than of the despairing agent of her own fate, by whose action alone the end could be accomplished. She lay there still, listening for the hurricane that must sweep her away—not taking, as she must do, that tremendous step for herself. But the closeness of it half stupefied, half paralysed her. The moment would come when she must wake, when the step would have to be taken; but what if in the meantime some celestial storm, some great heavenly chance impulse might burst in and carry her away? This happens sometimes—so that a man who intended to kill himself dies innocently in the meantime, and is saved all that trouble and pain. No one can tell what a day or an hour may bring forth. 'Perhaps the world may end to-night,' as the poet has said. But Joyce was not in hourly expectation like Mrs. Hayward. She accepted Thursday as the limit of her suspense. Before Thursday it must be done: but in the meantime, and for these two days, quiescence—something that, in the pause of despair, looked almost like peace.

This was not, however, undisturbed. There came a little note from Mrs. Bellendean with a final good-bye:—

'Just my love to my dear Joyce before I go away. Wishing her every good, and very confident that she will never forget me, nor all that has passed between us for long years; and that I am always her affectionate friend
M. B.'

All that had passed between them—for long years! No, Joyce would not forget.

There was also a letter from Andrew, announcing, as if nothing particular had happened, his return home.

‘And though my visit was not all that could be desired, yet I am glad that I made it, for it lets us both see, my dear Joyce, what is before us, and forewarned is forearmed. Also, I am anxious to let you know that I made acquaintance with a very respectable lady, the wife of a minister, who was most kind, so kind, indeed, that it was a difficulty to accept her attentions without the power of making any return. But I thought it my duty, as she seemed to be a friend of yours, to speak freely to her, so that you might find a support in her, as one lady can with another, and a person to whom, being unfortunately not at ease at home in that respect, you could talk freely of me.’

It was a pity that nobody save Joyce saw this effusion of the schoolmaster's genius. She was not capable of seeing the humour in it. It was so wonderful that her dreamy eyes opened wide with mingled consternation and astonishment. That he should speak so calmly of the tragic episode which had first opened to her the mystery of dreadful life which lay before her! That he should be so little capable of understanding what were the contradictions and the miserable limits of humanity! But she was too deep in that mystery to think of it. The two letters were found folded together afterwards.

And the evening and the morning made another day. It was Wednesday, the day of the party at the rectory, which had been turned into an opportunity for magnifying and exhibiting Joyce. The Jenkinsons and Mrs. Hayward had put their heads together for this object. That they thus acted together was due to Mrs. Hayward, who in the heat of her indignation and agitation had hurried to the rectory, on the morning after her enlightenment, to demand, not apologetically but passionately—‘Have you heard what they are saying about *our* Joyce? Do you believe it?’ Do you dare to believe it? was what Elizabeth's tone said. ‘She is a little hoity-toity,’ said Mrs. Jenkinson afterwards; ‘but you know, Canon, I have always said she was a good woman.’ The Canon, who did nothing but walk about the house overseeing (as he pretended) the preparations and making all the glass and the silver ring again, agreed in the judgment. ‘But I think it was I that always upheld Elizabeth,’ he said. ‘Anyhow, whoever was in

the right or wrong, these three people were agreed. If the rectory was of any weight in society, and Mrs. Jenkinson's accent in pronouncing that *If* was a model of polished sarcasm, then there could be no further doubt as to the opinion of the place. Everybody was coming—indeed one person was coming of whom no one knew, no, not even the Canon, excepting Mrs. Jenkinson and Mrs. Hayward alone. 'You could not ask him, I allow—but there can be no possible reason why I should not ask him. I will say I heard he was in town. I might have heard that from any one, from the St. Clairs themselves. No doubt they must know.' The knowledge of this secret invitation made Mrs. Hayward feel guilty when she confronted her husband and Joyce, of whom she now spoke as 'my daughter' to all her friends. But neither of these innocent persons observed her look of guilt: the Colonel, because he knew nothing at all about it, neither the conspiracy to shame Joyce, nor that which had been formed for her vindication; and Joyce, partly for this same reason, partly because she was paralysed, lying on the edge of that precipice, waiting for the cyclone, and that everything outside passed over her like a dream.

Mrs. Hayward herself superintended Joyce's dressing for this party. She came into the girl's room carrying a small miniature in an old-fashioned gold mount, to which was attached a knot of ribbon. 'I wish you to wear this,' she said—'your father sends it to you, Joyce. Look at the name upon the back, and you will see why I am going to pin it where it may be well seen. And if any one asks you who it is, say it is your mother.'

'Is it my mother—was she like that?' said Joyce, taking the miniature in her hand with a great tremor. It seemed to send some strange magnetism into her, tingling from the finger-points over her whole frame.

'She must have been like that, for it is the image of you,' said Mrs. Hayward; 'people will think it is your own picture you are wearing—but if you like, Joyce, you can let them see the inscription on the back. It is exactly you—but I think there is something more deep and steadfast in your eyes,' she said, looking at her earnestly. Mrs. Hayward was greatly stirred and excited. Perhaps it was this more than any warm impulse of feeling which made her give Joyce a sudden kiss after she had inspected her. She was pleased with her 'daughter's' appearance. Joyce wore a dress of soft white Indian silk, made very simply, with little ornament. It suited her slim youthful figure, which wanted no elaborate drappings or loopings. The miniature with its bow of dark-blue

ribbon was pinned on her breast. It was a curious ornament. The Joyce in the picture had her hair arranged in curls which fell upon her shoulders, and her dress was of the fashion of twenty-five years before—otherwise it was precisely like the Joyce who wore it now, only—and this thought pleased Mrs. Hayward, and gave a little outlet to feelings less admirable—there was something ‘more deep and steadfast’ in the eyes. Mrs. Hayward herself pinned the ribbon upon the girl’s breast. ‘I was always very sorry for her,’ she said in a low tone; ‘but she made great misery by disappearing like that. I hope, I believe, you have more stuff in you. Now, are you ready?’

The Colonel was standing in the hall waiting for his ladies, pleased and proud, and somehow more happy than usual in the conviction that at last Elizabeth had thoroughly ‘taken to’ Joyce. The thorn among his roses had been the absence of sympathy between those two. He said to himself, twinkling his eyes to get rid of a little moisture, that no mother could be more anxious about a girl’s appearance than was his wife about Joyce. She gave those little pats and pinches to her dress as they came downstairs which happy girls sometimes resent, but which come only from the mother’s hand. Now the crown of his happiness had come, for Elizabeth certainly at last had taken to Joyce. How could she have stood out against her, the Colonel thought, looking with pride at his child; and yet even as this proud thought passed through his mind, a little accompanying chill came with it. For she was pale, she was very quiet. There was little expectation of pleasure, of conquest, of admiration in her. Perhaps she had always been too grave and a little frightened in society, though with gleams of brightness. She was very quiet to-night.

Mrs. Hayward did not remark this. She was herself much excited, tremulous with feeling both belligerent and tender. Joyce had become the heroine of the most agitating romance—a romance in which she herself was too much involved to be calm. That guilty secret made her heart flutter. What if it might be thought to be her fault? What if Joyce should think her dignity compromised? She was so strange a girl, so little moved by ordinary motives. Mrs. Hayward took a little comfort from the fact that Joyce was not at all suspicious, and would never think of the possibility of a plot to bring her lover to her side—which partially reassured her; but still there was a flutter at her heart.

They were late of entering the rectory, and the rooms were full. Everybody was there. Mrs. Jenkinson received her friends rarely, but when she did so, invited all ‘the best people.’ It was a

little difficult to make the entrance which Mrs. Hayward had intended, so as to strike all objectors dumb. Mrs. Jenkinson, however, at the door of the room took Joyce in her arms in the sight of everybody with an unusual demonstration of delight. She held her at arm's-length for a moment and looked at her with admiring criticism. 'You are looking very nice—very nice indeed, my dear!' she said very audibly, as if she had been a niece at least. There is nothing like being a partisan. She had never perceived Joyce's beauty before, and that curious dignity—which came of the girl's shyness, and ignorance of social rules, and anxiety not to put her father to shame. 'I don't think there is any one here to compare with her,' she said to the Colonel, with a conviction which was dogmatic, and at once made a different opinion heresy.

Mrs. Sitwell, very ill at ease, had been hanging about the door until the Haywards appeared. She made an instant effort to secure Joyce's attention. 'Oh Joyce, let me speak to you—I have a great deal to say to you!' she cried, in a shrill whisper through the curious crowd. Mrs. Hayward confronted the parson's wife with an impulse of war which tingled through and through her, and raised her stature and brightened into fierce splendour her always bright eyes. 'Perhaps I will do as well as Joyce,' she said grimly, facing the traitor. What happened in that corner afterwards, we dare not pause to tell.

In the meantime the Canon appeared, with his big round black silk waistcoat, like a battering-ram cleaving the press before him, and held out his arm, bent to receive hers, almost over the heads of the wondering ladies. 'Come and take a turn with me, Joyce,' he cried, his large mellow voice rolling like the pervasive and melodious bass it was, making a sort of background to all the soprano chatter. He, too, paused to look at her when he had led her through the line of the new arrivals. 'Yes,' he said approvingly, 'you are looking very well and handsome; but not as you used to do—I miss my little enemy. There's neither war in your eye nor fun to-night. Come, Joyce, not so serious! We've met to enjoy ourselves. What's that you are wearing on your breast? Bless my soul!' The Canon paused, drawing a quick breath. 'Who put this upon you? It's your mother's picture?' He had turned so quickly to look at it, that her hand was disengaged from his arm. He took it in his own and held it while he gazed, and it became very evident to the circle about that the Canon was winking his eyes suspiciously as if to get rid of a little moisture there. 'Poor little Joyce!' he said. 'Where did you find it? I remember her

exactly like that ; and you are exactly like it. You can never deny your parentage, my dear, as long as you wear that.' .

It was not intended, nor in the programme ; but the little surprise was very effectual. It collected a little crowd round the pair. The people who had been so deeply impressed by the imposture practised upon them in respect to Joyce, and even Lady St. Clair herself, were drawn into that circle by the strong inducement of something to see which is so potent in an evening party. It had not been in the programme, it had all the force of an accident. It brought spectators from all the corners of the room to see what it was. 'The most extraordinary resemblance,' people said. 'A very pretty portrait ; no one could have thought it was meant for anybody but Joyce Hayward ; but it appears it is her mother.' 'With curls and an old-fashioned dress.' 'The dress we all wore in those days.' 'Then that story about her that she was a foundling, etc., etc.' 'It was a cruel bad story,' cried Lady Thompson, crying with pleasure and kindness, and the heat of the room which upset her nerves. 'I always knew it wasn't true.' Lady St. Clair and her little coterie retired into a corner, and there seemed to laugh and nod their heads among themselves, commenting on the scene ; but their discomfiture was clear.

All this that was passing round her was uncomprehended by Joyce. She was aware neither of the gossip nor of her own triumph. She stood by the Canon's side, confused with the flutter about her, the exclamations, the many looks that passed from her to the portrait, from the portrait to herself back again. The Canon had again drawn her hand within his arm, and she stood silent, patient, with a faint smile, pleased enough to find nothing more was required of her, leaning a little weight upon his fatherly arm, a slim white figure against his substantial bulk of black. Her other hand hung by her side amid the white folds of her dress. As she stood thus quietly, subdued, her attention not lively for anything, Joyce felt her hand suddenly taken and warmly, passionately pressed, with a touch which was most unlike the usual shaking of hands. There must have been something magnetic in it, for she started, and a sudden flood of hot colour poured over her from head to foot. She turned her head almost reluctantly yet quickly, and met, burning upon her in the heat of feeling long restrained, the eyes of Norman Bellendean.

CHAPTER XLV

‘JOYCE! Joyce!’

That seemed all she understood of what he said. The Canon had disappeared, leaving them together—and other faces appeared and disappeared as through a hot mist, which opened to show them for a moment, then closed up again—everything seemed to say, Joyce, Joyce! Her name seemed to breathe about her in a hundred tones—in warning, in reproof, in astonishment, in low murmuring passion. They seemed to be all speaking to her, calling to her, together: Mrs. Bellendean and Mrs. Hayward and Andrew and her father, and a soft half-audible murmur from Greta. And then this voice close by in her ear—Joyce, Joyce! Would they but be silent! Could she but hear!

Presently there seemed a movement in the scene, the figures around her streaming away, but always his voice in her ears saying she knew not what except her name. And after a while she found herself standing outside the rectory under a great blue vault of sky all tingling with stars. To her excited fancy they seemed to project out of the dark blueness above, as if to take part in this scene.

‘We are going to walk home,’ said Mrs. Hayward, ‘it is such a lovely night, and only a little way.’

‘And I’m going with you,’ said Captain Bellendean. ‘Yes, Colonel, I have plenty of time for the train.’

‘Well, perhaps yes,—enough, but not too much,—but we all go the same way.’

Something like this came to Joyce through the keen night air: and while the voices were still ringing, her arm was within his, and they were walking together as if it had been a dream.

‘Joyce: I don’t know if you hear me or not, but you make me no reply.’

Then all at once she seemed to come to herself and to con-

sciousness of all around her : the hard dry road which rang underfoot, the great vibrating stars above, intense with frost, with human interest (was it possible ?), with something which had never been in them before. She was warmly cloaked and wrapped up, a fleecy scarf over her head, her arm held closely in his, his face bending towards her. It seemed to be her first moment of full consciousness since that time when all the ladies were gathering round her looking at the miniature on her breast.

‘Captain Bellendean, it is all very strange to me. I don’t understand what is happening,’ she said.

‘I thought it was so : the noise and the chatter of these people, and the agitation—for you *were* agitated, Joyce.’

‘I did not expect to see you. I was surprised to see you.’

‘I startled you—I know I did. Didn’t you hear that I had come and waited on Monday—waited and waited in vain ? I do not know what you can have thought of me, Joyce. I should have come back months ago.’

She said nothing, and he thought he understood why, and it made him feel more deeply guilty than ever.

‘Some time when we are at our ease I will tell you everything and why I did not come ; but now I am here, and I want your answer, Joyce, the answer you would not give me that summer evening. Don’t turn your head away. You have scarcely spoken to me to-night. Don’t punish me so for my delay. If I have been long of coming, it was not altogether my fault. And now that I am here, and we are together——’

‘I know,’ she said, ‘why you have not come back, Captain Bellendean ; and your staying away was right, quite right, but not your coming. I heard of it, and I approved’—she made a little pause, and added fervently, using all her breath to say it—‘with all my heart !’

‘What do you mean ?’ he cried. ‘Joyce, you are vexed and angry : perhaps you have reason ; but not, not as you seem to think. How did you hear of it ? and what did you hear ?’

‘Captain Bellendean,’ she said again, ‘we have two different ways in this world. If I were to say what would please you, I would be mansworn. And even with that it might not please you long. And for you to speak as you are doing may be true ; but it’s not well for either you or me.’

‘Joyce,’ he cried, ‘it is not natural to speak to me like that. Have you no feeling for me ? Is it all a dream that has been passing in the summer, on the river, in the garden, the hours we have been together,—all that time was it nothing, did it mean

nothing? It did to me. I ceased to think of anything but you—you swept away everything else, every other thought. If we had not been interrupted that day—would you have answered me as you are answering me now?’

She said nothing to this; and it was hard upon Joyce that while this momentous conversation was going on her arm was linked in his, she was close to him, her figure lost in his shadow, and all her resolution unable to keep from him the sensation of the heavy beating of her heart.

‘You must have felt something for me then?’ he said. ‘It is dark now and I cannot see you; but I saw your face then: Joyce, don’t be hard upon me. I have taken a long time to think, for there were many things involved, but here I am; and if I’ve been long of coming, it shows the more the force that’s brought me. Joyce, if you had not been the only woman for me I should not have been here.’

‘It is a mistake,’ she said—‘it is a mistake,’ scarcely able to command her voice; ‘there is another woman. And there is—another man! Oh, hold your peace, Captain Bellendean! you and me, we have nothing to do with each other. You would repent it all your life long. And I would be mansworn.’

‘Are you thinking of that man? Joyce, you never loved that man—loved him!—he is not fit to tie your shoes: he is not worthy to be named or thought of, or—— Joyce, throw me off if you like—break my heart—but don’t tell me you are going to make yourself miserable for the sake of a childish promise. No, no! You shall not do it. I’ll go if I must, but not to leave you to that fellow—— Joyce!’

His tone of alarm and indignation went through and through her; her heart seemed to melt, and sink down in softness and weakness and ineffable yielding. He was ready to put himself aside and think only of her; anxious only to save her, not thinking of himself. He held her arm close to his side, and his heart throbbed against it, not in heavy beatings like hers, but leaping, bounding, in all the force of passion. The woman in her was roused to wonder and awe of the superior excitement of the man—and that it should be for her, to save her. But then, with the wildest inconsistency, he began to pour out his love, forgetting that he had said she was to throw him off if she liked, as she too forgot and never saw the inconsistency, nor was aware that he had changed from that tone of generous determination to save her into the broken rapid flow of his own confessions and pleading. Joyce was altogether carried away by this warm and impassioned tide.

She said not a word, but listened, drawn along upon his arm, close to him, swallowed up in his shadow, to the mingled sounds of his voice and his heart beating against her—a second voice, almost more potent than the first. She listened and felt the mingled sounds with a growing self-abandonment, a loss of all her powers of resistance, beginning at last to draw her own breath hard, to sob, with her heart in her throat, in sympathy rather than response. He was still pouring these words into her ear, 'still affecting all her pulses by that throbbing, when suddenly they arrived at the door of her father's house. Joyce was altogether inarticulate, incapable of disengaging herself or raising her face to the light, and he made no attempt to let her go. She could hear him say, 'Let me come in for a second,' in a strange interruption to the other words, and felt herself hurried in swiftly upon his arm, through the hall where the others were standing, to the softly-lighted room. There they stood together one long quiet moment, their hearts beating together; and Joyce heard herself sob; and he took her into his arms and kissed her, with a little cry of triumph. 'This time,' he said, 'there is no mistake! And there shall be none—never more.'

'Why shouldn't. I go in, Elizabeth? My dear, I must tell Bellendean he must not think he has too much time—and this is the last train. Of course I know you could put him up if he would stay all night. But he has no clothes. A man may dine in his morning coat, but he cannot put on his dress clothes in the morning—eh? He will think it very queer to be left only with Joyce.'

'Oh, for heaven's sake, Henry, hold your tongue, and let them alone!'

'Why, I should have thought you would be the first person to object to that,' the Colonel said, bewildered. He gave himself up to Baker to be helped with his coat, while his wife hung about restlessly in a state of excitement, for which the Colonel saw no reason. The door of the drawing-room had been left slightly open, and no sound came from it as if the young people were talking. Young people, who have been together to an evening party generally talk and laugh over its humours. Colonel Hayward felt that Joyce was not entertaining the guest, and that it was his own duty to remind Bellendean of that imminent train. And why his wife should hold him back he could not divine. Presently, however, Captain Bellendean appeared radiant, looking exceedingly nervous and excited, with moisture in his eyes, and even on one cheek, to Colonel Hayward's great astonishment. 'I know,' he

cried, 'you're in trouble about my train. I know I must fly. Mrs. Hayward, give me joy: *you* divine it all. And, Colonel, I must speak to you to-morrow.'

'Yes, yes, delighted! as long as you please; but if you are to catch that train,' the Colonel cried, having already flung open the door. 'To-morrow, my dear fellow! all right—as long as you please; but we must speed the parting guest! Good night, good night! God bless you!' he shouted with his cheerful voice out into the night.

Such a night! every star throbbing, vibrating, as if it knew—the dry frost-bound road giving forth a triumphant ring of sound wherever his foot fell. He seemed to himself to fly against the keen exhilarating air, which filled his breast like a spiritual wine. Perhaps there might come a cold fit after; but at present he was warm with love and enthusiasm and excitement and triumph. As he hurried along to the train, about which the Colonel was so concerned, Norman Bellendean sent out into the air a laugh of pleasure and delight. Whenever he should be hurried for a train, that vulgarest matter of every day, he thought to himself, in the triumphant satisfaction of his heart, that it would recall to him this night—the brightest moment, the sweetest recollection of his life.

Mrs. Hayward still stood in the hall—stood as nearly still as a woman in the highest excitement, scarcely able to speak for the whirl of suspense and expectation in her mind, could stand. She had taken off the white Shetland shawl which she had worn upon her head, but was still in her warm cloak, pulling her gloves in her hands, scarcely able to contain herself. She wanted to dispose of her husband before she herself flew to share, as she hoped, the happiness, the agitation of Joyce. 'Where are you going, Henry? not into the drawing-room at this hour? It's quite late; go and have your cigar, and I'll send Joyce off to bed.'

'It's not so very late,' said the Colonel. 'I thought you would like a chat by the fireside.'

'A chat! Go, my dear, and have your cigar. I know Joyce is very tired; it's been an exciting evening for her. I'll go and look after her, and get her off to bed. You must not disturb her, Henry. I'll come in and let you know that all's right.'

'What could be wrong?' said the innocent old soldier; 'and why should she be so tired? Well, Elizabeth, of course I will go away if you tell me; but I don't see——' He made a few steps towards his library, which Baker, much more in the secret of the evening than he, had thrown invitingly open, showing the cheerful

glow of the fire; and then another thought seized him. 'My love,' he said, coming back, putting his arm round her, 'it gives me more pleasure than I can say, to see that you are really and truly taking to Joyce.'

'Oh, for heaven's sake, Henry, go and have your cigar!' was his Elizabeth's unsympathetic reply, shaking herself free from him. She added, with a nervous laugh, 'Yes, yes; it's all right; but there's a dear, leave us alone now.'

Even when, with wondering looks, he had obeyed her, Mrs. Hayward lingered a moment longer. She was tingling with excitement and satisfaction and triumph. She had defeated the miserable conspiracy against Joyce, routing all her enemies, rank and file. She had secured such a triumph over Lady St. Clair and her 'set' as goes to any woman's heart, carrying off, under her very eyes, a prize such as rarely appeared in such suburban latitudes, not only the most excellent match that had been heard of there for many a day, but the fit hero of a romantic-story, and a real lover—connected with the St. Clairs too, to make the triumph sweeter, and carried over under their very nose. This was the vulgarer part of Mrs. Hayward's elation: but underneath was something truer, that genuine sympathy for a motherless girl, which is never far from a good woman's heart. She must miss her mother to-night, if never before. She must want some woman to take her into her arms, to hear her story. Elizabeth's heart had been touched the moment she had become Joyce's partisan and taken up the office of her defender and protector against all the world. It was touched still more tenderly now, as she thought to herself what a moment it was, the turning-point of the girl's life. The moisture came to her eyes only with thinking of it. She was ready to take Joyce in her arms, and cry over her, as if she had been her very own.

When she went into the room she found Joyce sunk down upon her knees by the side of the fire, her face covered in her hands. She lay there like one overwhelmed under a burden she could not bear—no light, no happiness, no elation in her. 'Joyce!' she cried, 'Joyce!' half alarmed, half irritated—for what did the girl mean, what did she want more than she had got? Mrs. Hayward was almost angry in the height of her excitement, though something in the utter despondency of the white figure sunk down upon itself restrained her. 'Joyce!' she repeated, laying a hand upon her shoulder——

'They all call me by my name,' said Joyce, 'you, and he—and the lady, and all——'

'What should we call you by, you silly girl? Joyce, you've made me quite happy to-night. Get up and let me give you a kiss, and tell you how pleased I am. There's nothing to cry about now—though I can understand,' she added quickly, 'that it's all gone to your heart.'

Joyce rose up slowly to her feet. She did not resist the quick embrace into which her step-mother took her. 'I know, my dear!' cried Mrs. Hayward, in the transport of her quick feelings, 'what you've had to bear. I know you've had a great deal to bear—all this waiting and uncertainty, and the cold chill—oh, my dear, I know!' She pressed her cheek against Joyce's, and it was wet with lively generous emotion. 'But all is well that ends well, and now I am sure you will be as happy as any woman in the world.'

'No,' said Joyce, 'no;' but her step-mother, in her elation and excitement, did not hear that low-toned negative. Mrs. Hayward held the girl against her breast, patting her shoulder with one hand.

'This has been a trying night,' she said. 'You've had a great deal to go through: but I understand it all. And you've done exactly as I should have wished you, Joyce. Everything went as I could have wished. Captain Bellendean's arrival like that, unexpected,'—Mrs. Hayward drew a long breath, in which there was an internal prayer that she might be forgiven for so very white, so very innocent a lie: not a lie, only a fib, the very worst that could be said of it—'his arrival unexpected, gave a sort of tone to the whole—a tone. And I suppose, in the thought of that you forgot everything else. But apart from him altogether—if you can think of anything apart from him—all went just as I should have wished. You conducted yourself just as I could have wished. And everything is as it should be, Joyce.'

Joyce said, 'No, no,' again, with a shiver. She stood scarcely responsive in Mrs. Hayward's embrace—making an effort to yield to it, to return the warm pressure a little, to lean upon the new prop so suddenly put up for her. But, happily, Mrs. Hayward felt too strongly herself, and was too much absorbed in her own quite unusual emotions to be sensible of the absence of response. She was occupied in feeling and expressing her feeling, not in studying that of another. She wanted to say a great many things; she wanted to prove to Joyce her motherly sympathy. That Joyce should only listen and say nothing did not occur to her as strange. Even when she left the girl in her own room, going in to poke the fire and make everything comfortable, Mrs.

Hayward's sensation was that she had been made Joyce's confidante, and that all the love-tale had been poured into her warmly sympathetic ear. She kissed Joyce and bade her good-night with all the fervour of a trusted friend. 'To-morrow we must return to prose a little,' she said—'to-morrow will be a good settling day. He is coming to talk to your father, and everything will be arranged. But for the present, good-night, my dear, and I hope you will sleep. Anyhow, whether you do or not, you'll be happy, Joyce. Good-night, my dear, good-night.'

Mrs. Hayward herself was so happy that she could not contain herself. It was nearly midnight, but she did not want to sleep. She had routed the enemy all round, and triumphed and brought home her spoil. To think that Joyce, who had at one time vexed her so much, should have been the occasion of this triumph! Poor Joyce, poor little Joyce! with this working in her mind all the time, poor dear, and making her abstracted and silent! And that man on the other side, and Mrs. Bellendean, who no doubt was trying all the time to put things wrong between them! A generous partisanship was in Mrs. Hayward's mind—a generous compunction for injustice done to Joyce—a generous wish to get everything for her that heart could desire—all enhanced by a far-off anticipation perhaps not so generous, a glimmer far distant in the recesses of her soul, that by and by Joyce, in the manner happiest for herself, would be taken away! But Mrs. Hayward felt that she loved Joyce, and would do anything for her in the strong and delightful exhilaration of the triumph of to-night.

CHAPTER XLVI

WHEN Joyce was left quite alone, and felt the shelter of the silence and solitude, she dropped again, as she had done in the room downstairs, upon the rug before the fire. Great distress and trouble are chilling things; they make the sick heart creep to the fire—the warmth gives a little forlorn comfort when all is low and ice-bound in the soul. She dropped there like a child—half seated, half on her knees. There was a kind of luxury in the feeling that no one could see or interrupt or sympathise with her—that she was safe for the long hours of the winter night, safe and alone.

What had she done? She had listened when she could not silence him. She had lost herself in listening, feeling his heart beat against her and his voice in her ears. She seemed to hear them now as soon as other people had left her—as soon as she was free from interrupting, unintelligible voices of others. He had told her, over and over again, what she knew—nothing but what she knew; and he must have felt her heart beating too, though not like his—beating heavily, loudly,—beating like a thing half stifled in bonds and ligatures—for he had not waited for any answer. He had taken her to himself when the climax came, and between them there could be no more said. Joyce recognised that there could have been no more said. She remembered that she was sobbing, unable to draw her breath, and that his breath too was exhausted, and all the words that could be used. She was not angry with him for taking her consent for granted—it was all that remained to be done. Their marriage and their long life together, and the height and crown of mortal existence, were all summed up in that moment. It had been, it was, and now it was past. She sat sunk upon herself by the fire and went over everything. That was the only way it could have been. She had for a time held him apart from her with good reasons, telling him

how it could not be. And then she had been silenced ; the words might have been withstood, but the throbbing of the heart (she could feel it still against her arm)—how could that be withstood ? That was something more than words ; and her own, so heavily throbbing, had sprung for a moment into the same measure, like something Joyce had never heard of nor read of—something that made an end of time and space and all limits. It had been too bewildering, too transporting, to think of. It was for a moment only ; and whether it ought to have been or not was a different question. It had been, and nothing could undo it. And it was past. That was the one thing of which she was sure.

She had never consented, she had said nothing, she had not deceived him. Though she might have deceived others, him she had not deceived. So long as she could speak to him, she had said No. Afterwards, when her voice failed her, when she could only sob, that moment had been—not by her will, but by his will—by something which was inevitable and could not be resisted. But now it was all over and past. Now she was separated from him as far as if worlds lay between them. There was no longer any time to hesitate. It was all fixed and settled, like the laws of the Medes and Persians. She had seen him for the last time. It was not on that subject that she had any further conflict with herself. The question was not that—not that any longer. The question was, What must be done ? what in the few hours that remained to her she must do ?

She lay there for a long time where she had sunk down, quite still and motionless, notwithstanding that she had so little time, not even thinking at all. Things flitted across her brain, but scarcely moved her—broken scenes, broken words, a look there, an exclamation here. Oftenest in her confusion it was her own name she seemed to hear—Joyce ! Joyce !—called out by everybody in turn, as everybody had appealed to her. Andrew whom she had deceived—he had the most right to blame her. She had never said that she loved him, but he had believed it. Poor Andrew ! It would not be any gain to him though she lost. And her lady, who had been so dear, and then had changed—to whom she had said that Joyce would do what was wished of her. And then the oracle—the oracle that had said, ‘You could do—no other thing.’ No, she could do no other thing. That was settled. It was not to be discussed ; there was no change possible in that. The only thing was what to do—oh, what to do !

Joyce never thought of taking away her own life. She would have given it joyfully for any of them to save them a pang ; but

take it away at her own caprice, no. She did not consciously reject this way, for she never took it into consideration. It was not among the things that were possible. And though she roused herself now and then at the end of a long discursive round of imaginations, some of them having no connection at all with what had happened, or was about to happen, to ask herself what she was to do, for a long time she did not think at all. Her candles burned, showing a light at her window long after every other light was out. In the barges lying about the bridge some way down the river, there were people who saw it shining, as was reported afterwards, through all the night. But Joyce was not even thinking. What roused her at last was the chill creeping over her—the cold of the deep night: her fire had fallen low, almost to nothing, a faint little red glow all blackening into darkness, and she shivered, and felt in her uncovered arms and shoulders the creeping dead cold, as if the frost had got in. This physical sensation, the shivering chillness, and ague of the cold, roused her when her trouble did not rouse her. She rose benumbed, her limbs stiff, and her heart sore, and wrapped a shawl round her, drawing it close for warmth. How grateful warmth is, when everything else has gone! It is the one thing in which there seems a little comfort. It brought her to life again, and the necessary movement helped that good effect. But bringing her back to life was to bring her back to thought; and she became conscious that time was running on, and that she had not yet decided what to do.

Time was running on. It was long past midnight, it was morning—the black morning of winter when everything is at its coldest, and all the world is desolate. Folding her arms in her shawl over her bosom to keep warm, her hand encountered the little frame of the miniature pinned on her breast. The touch woke her up with a keen prick of reality—as if it had been a sharp cold steel that had touched her. She unpinned it from her breast, and held it in her hand, and looked at it. There must have been magnetism in it. It seemed to bring a new flood of feeling, and will, and impulse over her. She had felt that strange inspiration in her veins before, that desire to arise and flee, she knew not whither. Her mother's inheritance left behind her when she had fled—where no one could follow. It was a sad inheritance to come into the world with, but it was the only one that Joyce had. She looked at the pictured face so like her own, and that brief long-ended tragedy became clear to Joyce. The other Joyce had endured as long as she could, and then there had come upon her that irrestrainable despairing desire to fly and be seen no more.

Oh that I had wings like a dove ! It had not perhaps in some ways been so difficult for her as for the second Joyce it would be. There was nobody to go after her, to move heaven and earth to find her—there were perhaps, Joyce thought, confusedly exaggerating the time, and its changes, as youth is so apt to do—no telegraphs, no railways then—at least there was no father, no lover, no friends ready to put all modes of discovery in motion. For a moment she envied her mother ; but then said to herself, with a sudden warm flush all over her. No, no ! Thank God, in her case there was no second life involved ; nobody to come into the world as she herself had done, in confusion and trouble, with all the lines of her life wrong from her birth, and this tragic conclusion always coming ! The touch of the cold little miniature seemed to send thrills and icy touches through her veins. The eyes had a strange look in them, like the eyes of a hunted creature. Mrs. Hayward had said that her own eyes were more deep and true. She rose up to look at herself, to see if perhaps that look had come to her too. A girl does not think what is the expression in her eyes ; but they had always been quiet eyes, she thought—not with that look. She went to the glass, with the miniature in her hand, to see. But when she stood before the glass, it was not her own expression, but the strange world of darkness and vacancy beyond, which caught Joyce's confused and troubled intelligence. She remembered all the fanciful superstitions, half poetry, half mirth, of the countryside. How some one would come behind you and look over your shoulder, and you would see in the mirror the man you were to marry, your fate ; or how perhaps it might be a white-robed ghost, or a death's-head that would advance out of the unseen and look over your shoulder ; or how in that strange fathomless darkness of the mirror there might rise before you scenes—of what was going on among those you loved, or what was to happen in the future, shadows of the real. She could not see her own eyes for the wonder which carried her beyond them, which made her look into the reflected air as if it were another world.

What a waste of time it was, and how the time was running on ! Only a few hours now before the step must be taken, and as yet no decision come to as to what it was to be ! She went and sat down at the table where were her writing things, and in her writing-case the letters—Mrs. Bellendean's note of farewell, and Andrew's—poor Andrew's ! Even now she could not think, but only look at these two momentous bits of paper, and wonder what *they* would think, how they would feel, whether they would blame

themselves. She even smiled to herself at the astonishment, the incredulity that would come over Andrew's face, and his conviction that whoever she had fled from it could not be from him. The lady would know better—it would give her a pang—but so long as everything came as she wished, the pang would not hurt her, it would go away. And then the wonder, and the questions, and the strong feelings would widen out and die away like circles in the water, and Joyce would go down and disappear like a stone.

Again this vague round of thought and nothing decided on, nothing done—and the time was running on. Twelve hours hence it would be the afternoon of the November day, and *he* would be here. And before then all must be settled and done. And in the meantime the glow of the fire had gone out in the blackness of the night, and it was cold—cold—a cold that went to the heart.

At breakfast next morning Joyce showed little trace of a sleepless night; her eyes were quite clear, her colour varying, but sometimes bright, her aspect not radiant as might become a girl in her position, yet very clear, like a sky that has cleared after rain. Thinking it all over in the light of after events no one could recollect anything about her that had called for special notice. She was grave, yet not without a smile: and a girl on the eve of the greatest change in her life, though she may be very gay if she is happy, has reason to be grave as well. Joyce was always thoughtful, and there was nothing wonderful in the fact that underneath the soft smile with which she responded to what was said to her there should be a gravity quite natural in the circumstances. No doubt there was a great deal to think about—the opposition that might be raised, the difficulties she would have to encounter. It would not be all plain sailing. Mrs. Hayward, a little anxious in the strength of her newly awakened sympathies, thought that she quite understood. Joyce went out for her usual morning walk with her father, just as usual so far as the Colonel could see. She talked a little more than usual, perhaps to prevent him talking of the great subject of the moment. He for his part was much excited with the information his wife had given. He was full of enthusiasm for Norman. 'If I had chosen the whole world through I could not have found a man whom I should have liked better,' he said. 'I always liked Norman Bellendean. I never could have imagined when we first came in contact in India, ~~in a~~ young sub and I his commanding officer, that he would ever be my son-in-law. How could I, not even knowing that I had—what good fortune was in store for me in finding you, my dear? But he was always a capital fellow. I liked him from the very first—'

fond of his profession and always ready for whatever was wanted—as good a fellow as ever lived,’ cried the Colonel, as he had done on his first introduction into these pages, taking upon him to answer to all the neighbours and tenants for the excellences of Captain Bellendean. Joyce listened very gravely, very sweetly, with a little inclination of her head in assent to all these praises. It pleased her to hear them, even though it was no business of hers.

‘But you must remember,’ she said, ‘always—that if there’s a pain in it, it’s leaving you. You’ve been good, good to me. I never knew what it was——’

‘Good!’ cried the Colonel, ‘there’s no credit in being good to you—and as for pain, my dear, no doubt we’ll miss you dreadfully, but it’s not as if he had to go away with the regiment to the end of the world.’ We’ll come and see you at Bellendean, and you’ll come to see us. I scarcely consider, with a man I like so thoroughly as Bellendean, that it will be leaving me.’

‘I was very ignorant when I came here,’ said Joyce; ‘I did not know what a father was. I was shy—shy to call you so. My old grandfather was so different. But, father, you have always understood, never discouraged me when I was most cast down, never lost patience. And I wish I could make you always mind that, when perhaps you may think of me—differently from what you do now.’

‘Why should I think of you differently? I may grudge a little to see my pretty Joyce marrying so soon, when I would have liked to keep her to myself: but it is the course of nature, my dear, and what parents must expect.’

‘I will always think upon you like this,’ she said: ‘the river flowing, and the banks green even though it’s winter, and the red oak-leaves stiff on the branches, and all the other big trees bare. And the sky blue, with white clouds flitting, and with a little cheerful wind, and the shining sun.’

‘Why in winter, Joyce?’ he said, smiling. ‘You might as well put me in a summer landscape if you are so fanciful! but you need not speak as if we were to be parted for ages, or as if you might not see me again. I’m not so dreadfully old, if that is what you mean.’

‘You will not be angry, father, if I speak to you of my old grandfather at home. When I saw him last he did not see me. He was walking through the corn, with his head bent and his heart sore. It was a bonnie summer day, and the corn all rustling in the wind, and high, almost up to his old bent shoulders. But he saw nothing, for he was thinking of poor little Joyce that he

had bred up from a baby, and that was going away. I have been a great trouble to everybody that has cared for me.'

'I am afraid I did not think enough of what it was to these old people, Joyce. To be sure, it was a loss never to be made up; but then when they knew it was for your good——'

'It is for our good,' said Joyce, 'when we die: but it's hard, hard to take comfort in that. I have never had that to bear, but I've seen it; and though a poor woman will believe that her little child has become one of the angels and will never have any trouble more, yet her heart will break just the same.'

'That's true, that's true,' he said: 'but it's not a cheerful subject, my dear, and just when your life is at its happiest——'

'Don't you think, father,' said Joyce, 'that when you are at your happiest it is like coming to an end?—for it seems as if heaven itself couldn't do any more for you, and the next step must just be coming down among common folk.'

'Don't say that to Bellendean,' cried the Colonel, 'for you may be sure he thinks that heaven can do a good deal more for him, and you too.'

But it was always an effort on the Colonel's part to bring her back to the contemplation of more cheerful prospects. She came in, however, freshened by the lively wind, her colour raised, her hair playing about her forehead in little rings, disentangled by the breeze, and was cheerful at luncheon, responding to all that was said. When they had left the table, she drew Mrs. Hayward aside for a moment, and asked if she might keep the miniature which had been given her to wear the previous night.

'I think so, Joyce: you have the best right to it. Ask your father, if you have any doubt on the subject.'

'I would rather ask you. It was kind, kind to bring it to me: nobody else would have had that thought.'

'I have always wanted to be kind,' Mrs. Hayward said, moved by an emotion which surprised her. 'We may not always have understood each other, Joyce. I may have been sometimes not quite just, and you were not responsive. It was neither your fault nor mine. The circumstances were hard upon us: but in the future——'

'I cannot call you mother,' said Joyce. 'You would maybe not like it, and I'm slow, slow to move, and I could not. But I would like to call you a true friend. I am sure you are a true friend. And we will never misunderstand each other again.'

'My dear, there's a kiss to that bargain,' said Elizabeth, with her eyes full of tears. She said after a moment, with a tremulous

laugh, 'But we'll misunderstand each other a hundred times, only after this it will always come right.'

There were no tears in Joyce's eyes, but there was something in them which was not usually there. Mrs. Hayward, after she had kissed her, looked at her again with mingled anxiety and curiosity. 'Joyce,' she said, 'you are tired out. I don't think you can have slept last night. Go and lie down and rest a little. You have got that look that is in your mother's eyes.'

When Joyce had gone upstairs, Mrs. Hayward went to the library, where the Colonel was seated with his paper. She said to him that she was not half so sure as she had been that Joyce was happy. 'I thought there could be no doubt about it. If ever two people were in love with each other, I thought these two were; but I don't feel so comfortable about it now.'

'Nonsense, my dear!' said the Colonel, who was a little drowsy. The room was warm, and the paper not interesting, and he had been proposing to himself to have a doze before Bellendean came to talk business and settlements. Mrs. Hayward did not disturb him further, but she was uneasy and restless. Some time after, she heard the outer door close, and came out into the hall with a little unexplainable anxiety to know who it was. 'It was Miss Hayward, ma'am, a-going out for a walk,' Baker said. Mrs. Hayward thought it was strange that Joyce should choose that time for going out, when Captain Bellendean might arrive at any moment. And then she suggested to herself that perhaps Joyce had gone to meet her lover—— 'Anyhow, a little walk in the fresh air will do her good,' she said to herself.

Norman arrived about half an hour afterwards, and was astonished and evidently annoyed that Joyce was not there to receive him. He went into the library, and had a long talk with the Colonel, and he came out again to the drawing-room where the tea-table was set out; but no Joyce.

'Send up one of the maids to see if Miss Hayward is in her room,' Mrs. Hayward said.

'Miss Hayward have never come in, ma'am,' said Baker; 'for she never takes no latch-key, and nobody but me has answered the door.'

'It is quite extraordinary. I cannot understand it,' cried the mistress of the house. And then the usual excuses were suggested. She must have walked too far; she must have been detained. She had not taken her watch, and did not know how late it was. Norman said nothing, but his looks were dark; and thus the early evening past. The dinner-hour approached, and they all went up-

stairs somewhat silently to dress. Mrs. Hayward was pale with fright, though she did not know of what she was afraid. She had already sent off her own maid to go to Miss Marsham's, to Mrs. Sitwell's, to the rectory, to inquire if Joyce was at either of these places. But the answer was No; she had not been seen by any one. What did it mean? They met in the drawing-room—Mrs. Hayward more scared and pale, Captain Bellendean more dark and angry, than before.

'Where is Joyce?' said the Colonel. 'You don't mean to say she has never come back! Then there must be something wrong.'

'If she is staying away on account of me——' said Bellendean, looking almost black, with his eyebrows curved over his eyes, and and his moustache closing sternly over his mouth.

'On account of you! My dear fellow, what a strange idea! It's only because of you that I'm surprised at all,' said the Colonel, as if it had been the most ordinary thing in the world that Joyce should not come home to dinner. Mrs. Hayward said nothing, but she was very pale; though why Joyce should absent herself, or what was the meaning of it, she could not guess. 'Let us go in to dinner,' said the Colonel. 'If anything had happened to her we must have heard at once. Probably she is dressing in a hurry now, knowing that we will all fall upon her as soon as she shows. Give my wife your arm, Bellendean.' He was quite cheerful and at ease now that there was really, as Mrs. Hayward reflected, something to be anxious about; and he continued to talk and keep up the spirits of the party throughout dinner; but it was a lugubrious meal.

Mrs. Hayward ran upstairs to Joyce's room as soon as she was free. She made a hurried survey of her tables and drawers, where nothing seemed to be wanting. She stood bewildered in the orderly silent room, where nothing had been disturbed since the morning—no signs of usage about, no ribbon or brooch on the table, or disarray of any kind. How cold it looked, how dead!—like a place out of which the inhabitant had gone. It exercised a kind of weird influence upon her mind. She stood back in alarm from the glass before which Joyce had stood last night, gazing into the unknown. Mrs. Hayward was not at all superstitious, but it frightened her to see the blank of the reflected vacancy, as if something might come into it. It could not be more blank than the vacant room, which threw no light whatever on the mystery. Where had she gone? There could not be anything in those suggestions which she had made, not without a chill of doubt, in the afternoon. Joyce could not be detained anywhere all this time,

could not have taken too long a walk, or mistaken the time. It was impossible to believe in any such simple solution now : nearly nine o'clock—and she knew that her lover was to be here ; and all the decorums of the dinner-hour and the regulations of the house. No, no, that was impossible. Could she be ill?—could she——

Mrs. Hayward started violently, though it was only a soft knock at the door. 'If you please, Miss Marsham is downstairs wishing to see you.' Ah, it was that then! she cried to herself, her heart giving a bound of relief. She was ill. Something had happened—a sprained ankle, or some easy matter of that kind. She ran downstairs relieved, almost gay. It might be a troublesome business, but so long as that was all——

Miss Marsham was standing in front of the fire with a large black veil tied over her hat. She was one of the feeble sisters who are always taking cold. She came forward quickly, holding out cold hands without gloves. 'Oh!' she cried, 'has Joyce come back? is it all right? is there anything wrong?'

'Do you mean,' cried Mrs. Hayward harshly, 'that you've only come to ask me questions—not to tell me anything?'

'Oh!' cried Miss Marsham, clasping her thin hands, 'then she must have done it, though I did not advise her to do it: I did not understand——'

'What?' cried Mrs. Hayward, darting upon her, seizing her arm.

Miss Marsham told her story incoherently, as well as in her agitation she could tell it. 'She asked my advice. There was some lady whose heart would be broken—who had never suffered, never been disappointed, and who had to be saved. And there were two gentlemen—— I cannot tell you any more—indeed, I cannot; I only half understood her. I told her—that to sacrifice one's self was always the easiest.'

The gentlemen came in while Miss Marsham was speaking. The Colonel, still quite cheerful, saying, 'Depend upon it, we shall find her in the drawing-room.' Captain Bellendean was as dark as night. 'I told her—that to sacrifice one's self was always the easiest,' were the words they heard as they came into the room; the sound of voices had made their hearts jump. Norman had taken a quick step forward when he saw that Mrs. Hayward was not alone. This strange figure was not like Joyce, but who could tell?——

'I told her that it came easiest to women—that to sacrifice one's self——'

‘To whom did you say that?’

‘Oh, Captain Bellendean! if I said what was wrong. I did not understand her: There was some one whose heart would be broken, a girl who had never been disappointed. I said to sacrifice one’s self——’

‘To sacrifice one’s self!’ cried Captain Bellendean, with a roll of low sound like the roar of an animal in pain.

‘I said it was the easiest—rather than to let some one else suffer, whoever it might be. Oh, God forgive me—God forgive me—if I said wrong!’

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Hayward’s maid came in. ‘If you please, ma’am,’ she said.

‘What is it? Miss Hayward has come back?’

‘If you please, ma’am,’ said the maid, ‘some of her clothes are—not there. And Mr. Baker says she sent away a box this morning.’

‘Where is Baker?’ said the Colonel.

He was not far off, but at the door, fully prepared for the emergency. He did not wait to be questioned. ‘It was a box,’ he said, ‘like as Miss Hayward have sent off before,—I didn’t take particular notice. The baker took it to the station. He had his cart at the door.’

‘What do you mean by a box!’ said the Colonel, to whom they all left this examination, and who asked the question without excitement, as only partially understanding the importance of it.

‘A box, Colonel!—well, just a common sort of a box—like the ladies sent to the ‘Ospital Christmas-time—like Miss Hayward have sent off before——’

‘Did you see the address?’

‘You see, ma’am, the baker, his cart was at the door,—and he ups and says, if the young lady had no objection, he’d take it and welcome. So I gives him a hand up with it, and never see the address—except just London.’

‘You are sure it was London?’

‘Oh yes, Colonel—at least, I wouldn’t like to take nothing in the nature of an oath: but so far as being sure——’

‘That will do,’ said Mrs. Hayward quickly. ‘Now, you may go.’ She burst forth as soon as the door was closed, ‘She has done what her mother did; but why—but why?’

→ A little later, before this mournful company separated, Joyce’s little writing-case was brought downstairs, and in it was found Andrew’s letter and Mrs. Bellendean’s folded together. On a piece of paper separate—which, however, had no appearance of

being intended for a letter—Joyce had written something in a large straggling hand, very different from her usual neat writing. It was this—

‘I can do no other thing. To him I would be mansworn—and to her no true friend. And what I said was, Joyce will do—what is wanted of her. I can do no other thing.’

CHAPTER XLVII

NEARLY twenty-four hours later the chill of the wintry night had closed over the village of Bellendean. The frosty weather had gone, and was replaced by the clammy dampness and heavily charged atmosphere of a thaw. There had been showers during the day, and a Scotch mist had set in with the falling of the night. Janet Matheson and her old husband were sitting on either side of the fire. Peter had got to feel the severity of the winter weather, and though he still did his day's work, he was heavy and tired, and sat stretching his long limbs across the hearth with that desire for more rest which shows the flagging of the strength and spirit. Janet on the other side of the fire was knitting the usual dark-grey stocking with yards of leg, which it was astonishing to think could be always wanted by one man. They were talking little. An observation once in half an hour or so, a little stir of response, and then the silence would fall over them again, unbroken by anything but the fall of the ashes from the grate, or the ticking of the clock. Sometimes Janet would carry on a little monologue for a few minutes, to which Peter gave here and there a deep growl of reply; but there was little that could be called conversation between the old pair, who knew all each other's thoughts, and were 'company' to each other without a word said. There were few sounds even outside: now and then a heavy foot going by: now and then a boy running in his heavy shoes on some cold errand. The cold and the rain had sent indoors all the usual stragglers of the night.

'Yon letter's near a week auld,' said Peter. They had not been talking of Joyce; but a quarter of an hour before had briefly, with a few straggling remarks at long intervals, discussed the crop which 'the maister' had settled upon for the Long Park, a selection of which Peter did not approve; but no explanation was needed for this introduction of a new subject. There could be no doubt between them as to what 'yon letter' meant.

'There'll be anither the morn,' said Janet, 'when she has passed the Thursday, it aye comes on the Saturday. She will have been thrang with something or other. It's the time coming on for a' thae pairties and balls.'

Peter gave a long low subterraneous laugh. 'It would be a queer thing,' he said, 'for you and me to see oor Joyce at ane o' thae grand balls.'

'And wherefore no?' said Janet. 'Take you my word for't, she'll aye be ane o' the bonniest there.'

'I'm no doubtin' that,' he said; and silence fell again over the cottage kitchen—silence broken only after a long time by an impatient sigh from Janet, who had just cast off her stocking, rounding the ample toe.

'Eh,' she said, 'just to hae ae glimpse of her! I would ken in a moment.'

'What are ye wantin' to ken?'

'Oh, naething,' said Janet, putting down the finished stocking after pulling it into shape and smoothing it with her hand. She took up her needles again and pulled out a long piece of worsted to set on the other, with again a suppressed sigh.

'Siching and sabbing never mean naething,' said Peter oracularly.

'Weel, weel! I would like to see in her bonnie face that she's happy amang thae strange folk. If ye maun ken every thocht that comes into a body's heart——'

'Hae ye ony reason——' said Peter, and then paused with a ghost of his usual laugh. 'Ye're just that conceited, ye think she canna be happy but with you and me.'

'It's maybe just that,' said Janet.

'It's just that. She has mair to mak' her happy than the like of us ever heard tell of. I wouldna wonder if ye were just jealous—o' a' thae enterteenments.'

'I wouldna wonder,' Janet said. And then there was a long silence again.

Presently a faint sound of footsteps approaching from a distance came muffled from the silence outside. The old people, with their rural habit of attention to all such passing sounds, listened unawares each on their side. Light steps in light shoes, not any of the heavy walkers of Bellendean. Would it be somebody from the Manse coming from the station? or maybe one of the maids from the House? They both listened without any conscious reason, as village people do. At last Peter spoke—

'If she wasna hunders o' miles away, I would say that was her step.'

'Dinna speak such nonsense,' said Janet. Then suddenly throwing down her needles with a cry, 'It's somebody coming here!—whisht, whisht,' she added to herself, 'that auld man's blethers puts nonsense in a body's heid.' Janet rose up to her feet with an agitated cry. Some one had touched the latch. She rushed to the door and turned the key—'We were just gaun to oor beds,' she cried, in a tone of apology.

And then the door was pushed open from without. The old woman uttered a shriek of wonder and joy, yet alarm, and with a great noise old Peter stumbled to his feet.

It was *her* or her ghost. The rain glistening upon her hat and her shoulders—her eyes shining like brighter drops of dew—a colour on her cheeks from the outdoor air, a gust of the fragrance of that outdoor atmosphere—the 'caller air' that had always breathed about Joyce—coming in with her. She stood and smiled and said, 'It's me,' as if she had come home after a day's absence, as if no chasm of time and distance had ever opened between.

No words can ever describe the agitated moment of such a return, especially when so unexpected and strange, exciting feelings of fear as well as delight. They took her in, they brought her to the fire, they took off her cloak which was wet, and the hat that was ornamented like jewels with glistening drops of the Scotch mist. They made her sit down, touching her shoulders, her hair, her arms, the very folds of her dress, with fond caressing touches, laughing and crying over her. Poor old Peter was inarticulate in his joy and emotion. Nothing but a succession of those low rolling laughs would come from him, and great lakes of moisture were standing under the furrows of his old eyebrows. He sat down opposite to her, and did nothing but gaze at her with a tenderness unspeakable, the ecstasy which was beyond all expression. Janet retained her power of movement and of speech.

'Eh, my bonnie lamb! eh, my ain bairn! you've come back to see your auld folk. And the Lord bless you, my darlin'! it's an ill night for the like of you—but we'll warm you and dry you if we can do naething mair; and there's your ain wee room aye ready, and oh, a joyfu' welcome, a joyfu' welcome!'

'No, granny, I cannot go back to my own room. I've come but for a moment. I'm going away on a journey, and there's little time, little time. But I couldn't pass by——'

'Pass by—— No, that would ha' been a bonny business,' said Peter, with his laugh—'to have passed by.'

Joyce told them an incoherent story about a ship that was to sail to-night. 'I am going from Leith—and there was just an hour or two—and I must be back by the nine o'clock train. It's not very long, but I must not lose my ship.'

'And are they with you, Joyce, waitin' for you? and whatfor did ye no bring the Cornel? The Cornal wasna proud—he didna disdain the wee bit place. And no even a maid with ye to take care of ye! Oh ay, my bonnie woman, weel I understand that—you would have naebody with ye to disturb us, but just a' to oorsels——'

'Ony fule,' said Peter, 'would see that.'

'We're a' just fules,' said Janet, 'for weel I see that, and yet I'm no sure I'm pleased that she's let to come her lane—for I would have her guarded that nae strange wind, no, nor the rain, should touch her. I'm wantin' twa impossible things—that she should be attendit like a princess, and yet that we should have her her lane, a' to you and me.'

'It's very cold outside,' said Joyce, 'and oh, so warm and cosy here! I have never seen a place so warm nor so like home since I went away. Granny, will you mask some tea though it's so late? I think I would like a cup of tea.'

'That will I!' cried Janet, with a sense of pleasure such as a queen might feel when her most beloved child asked her for a duchy or a diamond. Her face shone with pure satisfaction and delight, and her questions ran on as she moved to and fro, making the kettle boil (which was always just on the eve of boiling), getting out her china teapot, her best things, 'for we maun do her a' honour, like a grand visitor, though she's our ain bairn and no the least changed——' These observations Janet addressed to Peter, though they were mingled with a hundred tender things to Joyce, and so mixed that the change of the person was hard to follow.

'Whatfor should she be changed?' said Peter, with his tremulous growl of happiness. The old man sat, with an occasional earthquake of inward laughter passing over him, never taking his eyes from her. He was less critical than Janet; no suspicions or fears were in his mind. He took her own account of herself with profound faith. Whatfor should she be changed? Whatfor should she be otherwise than happy? She had come to see them in the moment she had in the middle of her journey, alone, as was natural—for anybody with her would have made a different thing of it altogether, and weel did Joyce ken that. He was thoroughly satisfied, and more blessed than words could say. He sat well

pleased and listened, while Janet told her everything that had passed. Although it had been told in letters, word of mouth was another thing, and Joyce had a hundred questions to put. She was far more concerned to hear everything that could be told her than to tell about herself; but if Peter remarked this at all, it was only as a perfection the more in his 'bonnie woman'—his good lassie that never thought of herself.

'And oh, but the Captain was kind, kind!' said Janet. 'He came and sat where ye are sitten', my bonnie doo, and just tauld me everything I wanted to ken—how ye were looking, and the way ye were speaking, and that you and the Cornel were great friends, and the very things ye were dressed in, Joyce. He must have taken an awfu' deal of notice to mind everything. He would just come and sit for hoors——'

Joyce moved her seat a little farther from the fire. The heat was great, and had caught her cheek and made it flush. It grew white again when she withdrew from the glow, but she smiled and said in a low tone, 'He is very kind: and you would see the lady, granny, and Miss Greta.'

'No for a long time. You had always a great troke with them, Joyce, and they with you, but when once my bonnie bird was flown, it's little they thought of your old granny. There was a great steer about the Captain and her, but I kenna if it was true. There's aye a talk about something, but the half o't is lees. He's owre good for her, it's my opinion. I've a real soft corner for the Captain.'

'He kent the way to get roond ye,' said Peter, 'aye flatterin' aboot that bit lassie there.'

'He was real kind. He would just sit for hours, and mind everything.'

'Granny,' cried Joyce, interrupting hastily, 'you have told me nothing about the new mistress, and how she took up my place.'

'But I wrote it a' down in my letters,' said Janet. 'That's no like word of mouth, you're thinking? Well, you see, Joyce'—and Janet went over the whole career of the new schoolmistress, who had not given entire satisfaction. 'As wha could?' said the old woman. 'Ye just spoiled them, they could get nobody that would have pleased them after you.'

'You're no asking about Andrew,' said Peter.

'Eh, poor lad!' cried Janet, 'I wouldna have wondered if he had come ower the nicht: but now it's too late.'

'Granny,' cried Joyce, with a little cry of alarm, 'you'll say nothing to Andrew? Oh, not a word! Never let him know I

was here. I would fain, fain not be unkind—but there are some things that cannot be. Oh, I was very silly, I should have known. You'll tell him to think of me no more—that I'm not worthy of it; but, oh, never tell I've been here.'

'No, my bonnie lamb, no, my ain dear. He never was worthy o' you. He shall hear not a word—nor nae ither person, if that's your pleasure, Joyce.'

'Oh, granny dear! but it's time now, and I must go.'

Janet's heart was very heavy; but there was no time for questions, and she saw that Joyce was little disposed to explain. 'We'll go with her to the station, and see her off,' she said, taking her big shawl out of the aumrie. 'I'm laith, laith to part with you, Joyce: but it would be nae kindness to make ye late, and they'll be meeting you at the train.'

'I must not be late,' Joyce replied. She looked round with a faint smile, and tears were in her eyes, and her lips moved as if she was saying something. Janet's heart was sore for her child. Why was she left to travel all alone in a wild and dark night like this? Why should she say nothing of her father, or of any one that was with her? Janet's mind misgave her—she was full of fears: Joyce was 'no hersel.' She was very loving, very tender, and smiled, and tried to look at ease; but she could not deceive the old woman whom love enlightened, who knew all her ways and her looks. There was something in her eyes which Janet did not know. She did not understand what it meant, but it meant trouble. There was trouble written all over Joyce. Her fond old guardian knew not what it was, only knew it was there.

The two old people went to the station with her through the windy, weeping night, saying little on either side. Joyce clasped her old grandmother's arm tightly in hers, but scarcely spoke, and Peter stalked beside them, half exhilarated, half heart-broken—he did not know which. To have had her for a little was sweet, but then to see her go away. She clung to them, crying quietly under her veil, as they put her into a corner of a vacant carriage—not without a forlorn pride that it was first class—and wrapped her cloak round her. They had no fine phrases, but to smooth the folds of her dress, to tuck the cloak round her, was always some faint satisfaction. 'I'll write,' she said, 'as soon as I can, but it may be long. You'll not lose heart, only wait, wait, and I'll write——'

'Oh, my darlin', we'll wait—but, Joyce, where are you goin', where are you goin', that you speak like that?'

'Good-bye, grandfather,—good-bye, granny, dear granny!'

Janet clutched Peter with a grasp that hurt even that old arm

of his, all muscle and sinew. 'Noo,' she said, in an imperative whisper, 'gang hame to your bed : I'm goin' after her. Dinna say a word to me, but gang hame to you bed. I'll come back the morn's morning, or as soon as I can.'

'Gaun after her ! and what good will that do her ?' cried Peter in consternation.

'At least, I'll see her safe,' said Janet, clambering into a third-class carriage. The train was almost in motion, and carried her off before her astonished husband could say another word. The old man stood bewildered, and looked after the train which carried them both from him. But he had that inexhaustible rural patience which makes so many things supportable. After a few minutes he went away, slowly shaking his head. 'She has nae ticket,' he said to himself, 'and little money in her pooch, and what guid can she do in ony case ? But after a while he obeyed Janet's injunction and went slowly home.

It was hard work for Janet to keep sight of Joyce when they came to the great Edinburgh station : she was little accustomed to crowds—to be hustled and pushed about as a poor old woman getting out of a third-class carriage so often is : but fortunately her eyes had kept the long sight of youth, and she managed to trace the movements of her child. One thing was sure, that nobody was there to meet Joyce, not even a maid. The girl made her way by dark passages and corners to the place where another little train was starting for Leith, where Janet followed her breathless. It was very raw and cold, windy and gusty, the wind blowing about the light of the lamps, driving wild clouds across the sky, dashing rain from time to time against the carriage windows, and the atmosphere was dreary with a sense of the wilder darkness of the approaching sea. Presently they came to the port and to the quay, where a confused mass of vessels, made half visible by the flaring melancholy lights, lay together, with lamps swinging at their masts. The pavement was wet and slippery, the wind was keen and cold, and blew blasts of stinging rain like tears over her face as she toiled along. But she never lost sight of Joyce. The Firth was tumbling in dark waves, faintly visible in a liquid line, apparent at least so far that it was not solid earth, but something wilder, more dreadful, insecure—and it raved and dashed against the pier and the sides of the ships, sometimes sending up a leaping white vision of spray like something flying at your throat, and always a sound as of contending voices, the shout of oncoming, the long grinding drag of the withdrawal as wave followed wave. The boats moved and creaked at anchor, the lamps and dim masts

and funnels rising and falling. There were gangways each with its little coloured smoky lamp, from one steamboat to another, lying ready to start, three or four deep against the pier. Janet saw the solitary figure which she had tracked so long pause, as if with a moment's hesitation, at the first of these gangways, and she made a rush forward at the last after this long course, to grip her child by the dress, by whatever thing she could clutch and hold, and cry, 'No, no ; you'll gang no further ! oh, Joyce, my bairn, you'll gang no further !' But she slipped and fell, being exhausted with the long and weary walk, and, breathless with labour and fatigue, could get nothing out but a panting No, no, which had no meaning. When she got to her feet again the slim figure was gone. She thought she could trace it on the farthest point, standing upon the paddle-box of the steamer, and ever after believed that the speck of whiteness in the dark was Joyce's face turned back towards home. That was the last she saw.

The old woman stood upon the pier for long after. She stood and watched while a few other passengers arrived, talking dolefully about the stormy night, and tried to take a little comfort thinking that perhaps 'the Cornel' might be among them, and Joyce after all have a protector and companions. There was one tall man, indeed, speaking 'high English,' whom Janet almost made up her mind, with an unspeakable lightening of her heart, must be 'the Cornel.' Her old eyes could not trace him through the maze of the steamboats to the one upon which she had kept a despairing watch : but fatigue and misery had by this time dimmed her faculties. Then that farthest boat, the one that held her child, with shouts and shrieks of steam, and lights wavering through the gloom, and every dreadful noise, got into motion, and went out upon the tumbling, stormy sea. Janet watched the light rising and sinking, the only thing visible, till that too disappeared in the darkness. And then all was quiet but the booming of the Firth against the piers, and the creek and jar of the other steamboats preparing to follow. She withdrew a little and leant against a post, and dried her eyes with a trembling hand. 'Oh, my bairn ! my bairn !' she said to herself.

'What ails the woman ?' said the watchman on the pier. 'There's naething to make a wark about ; they'll get a bit heezy, but nae danger. It'll be a son or a daughter ye've been seeing off.'

'Oh, man, I'm thankful to you !' said Janet. 'Are they a' for the same airt.'

'They're a' for the far north,' said the watchman, continuing his heavy march.

CHAPTER XLVIII

JANET had scarcely recovered the use of her tired limbs next morning and begun languidly to 'redd up' the cottage, with many anxious thoughts in her breast, when an unusual sound of masculine footsteps attracted her attention. She was in a very nervous, vigilant state, expecting she knew not what, although it had seemed as if everything had happened that could happen, now that Joyce had come—and gone so mysteriously: that she should come had always been a possibility before, but now was so no longer. The tramp of these imperative feet, not the slow tread of labouring men, attracted her anxious ear some distance off. She put away her brush and listened. The door stood open though the morning was cold, and a ray of pale and watery sunshine came in. Janet was afraid to look out, with an instant swift intuition and alarm lest somehow her child's interest might be involved, and she could scarcely be said to be surprised when she saw the Captain, accompanied by an older grey-haired man whom she at once recognised as 'the Cornel.' 'Eh, but I must be careful. She wasna with him after a', said Janet to herself. She had been very tremulous and shaken with fatigue and anxiety, but she braced herself up in a moment and stood firmly on the defensive, whatever might be about to happen. The two gentlemen looked harassed and anxious. They came straight to the cottage door without any pause or hesitation. 'Is Miss Joyce here?' the Captain asked breathless, without even mainners to say good morning, as Janet remarked.

'Na, Captain, she's no here.'

'My good woman,' said the Colonel, breathless, too, 'don't be unkind, but tell us where my daughter is. We've come from London. I never denied your interest in her—never opposed her love for you. Bellendean will tell you. Let me see Joyce, for God's sake!'

but failed and failed again. She had but little money for a long voyage. All indeed was darkness from the time when they traced her to the station at Bellendean. A young lady in company with an old woman had been seen at Leith; but Janet, who alone could have thrown any light on this, remained silent. Indeed, she had no confession to make, for she had only been with Joyce as a watcher is with the object of his stealthy pursuit. And Janet was all the more safe a guardian that she knew absolutely nothing. There never departed from her old eyes the vision of the lamp upon the mast, tossing with the movement of the waves, disappearing into the blackness of the night, a forlorn spark in the immeasurable vacancy of invisible sky and sea. Where had that symbol of humanity gone? what fathomless gloom had it penetrated with its faint-coloured gleam of living? All her superiority over the others lay in the image of that tossing light, and the faint spars it illuminated for a moment in the black gulf of the unknown.

So Joyce disappeared and was seen no more.

Miss Marsham never forgot nor could think, without a sinking of the heart, of that unfortunate night when the oracle had spoken by her mouth, all unaware of the nature of the being addressed, or the tragical matters involved. • For the consequences of that self-sacrifice were disastrous all round. The Haywards' pleasant house was shut up, while they travelled the world, looking for the lost girl. Mrs. Hayward was the most energetic in the pursuit—for the Colonel, though he missed her more, and was more 'fond' of Joyce, had neither any sense of wrong to move him, nor any prick of the intolerable such as wrings the heart of an impatient woman, half thinking herself to blame. Canon Jenkinson, though so much less concerned, would probably not have gone to America at all on that famous expedition of his, about which his well-known book was written, had it not been for a hope that in some American school or lecture-hall he would find her, though everybody else failed. Norman Bellendean was affected most of all. He had a dreadful scene with his step-mother, from which that poor lady did not recover for a long time; and instead of going home, and finally allowing himself to be drawn into the natural circle of county politics and relationships, with Greta for his pretty and happy wife, as had been desired and hoped—he went back, sullen and wretched, a misanthrope and woman-hater, to his regiment in India, leaving his estate in the hands of an agent, the house shut up and uninhabited. Greta married after a while, and was just as comfortable as if she had attained the man of her

first choice, whose loss it was believed would break her heart. She was the only one quite unaffected by all that had taken place, although her comfort was the one prevailing cause of all this trouble. Mrs. Bellendean was severed once for all from Bellen-dean and everything near. And yet she could say to herself truly that she meant no harm, that she had never expected serious harm to follow. All she meant was to avert an unsuitable marriage, which it is every woman's duty to do, by encouraging a girl, who was already engaged, and had no right to accept another man's attentions, to keep to her plighted word. Perhaps it was hard upon her to suffer so much for so little—and almost harder, seeing that Greta, in whose interests she acted, did not suffer at all.

Andrew Halliday, who also was, so far as he was aware, perfectly innocent, and who never knew what harm he had done by betraying Joyce's story to the very respectable lady, the minister's wife, who had been so kind to him—came through the trial as a man of native worth and respectability was likely to do. He waited for some time hoping to hear from Joyce, who, he felt sure, even if circumstances separated her from her family, would communicate with him. He thought the step she had taken ill-judged and excessive, even though it was in consequence of their opposition to the wishes of her heart in respect to himself. 'These hasty steps are always to be regretted,' Andrew said, 'especially as no doubt the Cornel would have been brought to see what was best for her interest if she had but given him a little time.' But when months came and brought no sign, Andrew's dignified disapproval changed into a judicial anger. 'Poor thing,' he said, 'she never had any real perception of her own best interests.' And in course of time he married a very respectable lady with a little money, and was much happier than he could have been with Joyce.

And silence closed over Joyce and all her ways: she sank out of sight as if she had never been. Her name and image lingered in some faithful recollections, then in mystery and silence disappeared, and was seen and heard no more.

It was curious, however, that within a year Janet and Peter Matheson disappeared also from their cottage. They sold their few goods, 'no able to bide the place after what had happened,' Janet said. But Peter, instead of echoing this judgment, shook with a long low subterranean laugh, such as used to mark his enjoyment of Joyce's remarks and pleasant ways. They disappeared and nobody ever knew where they had gone. 'To their friends in the North,' the

village people said, but nobody before had ever heard of these friends.

It was not till years after that there came a curious rumour to the mainland far away at the most distant point of Scotland, of a great transformation that had been going on in one of the most remote and inaccessible of the isles. Whether it was St. Kilda or the Fair Isle, or some other scrap of rock and mountain in the middle of the wild northern seas, this chronicler has no information. But the legend ran that suddenly, upon a wild wintry afternoon, a lady had landed on that island. Whether her wealth was boundless and her power miraculous, as some said, could not be proved save by rare visitors to the islands. But at all events, there seemed no reason to doubt that she had acquired a wonderful ascendancy, and made many extraordinary changes among the primitive people. She taught them many things, among others what domestic comfort and cleanliness and beneficent learning meant, and knew everything, according to the story. The few sportsmen who touched upon these wild shores were not, however, ever gratified with a sight of this Princess of the Isle. They heard of the lady, but never saw her, and from their wondering accounts and conjectures, it appeared that she was young, and considered by her subjects beautiful. But no stranger nor Englishman, nor any wandering visitor, has ever found out more than this respecting the Lady of the Isle.

THE END

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